



A gate to Birmingham Community Charter High School is locked with a sign stating that school is closed, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2015, in Van Nuys, Calif. All schools in the vast Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second largest, were ordered closed due to an electronic threat Tuesday.

CHRIS WEBER  
TAMI ABDOLLAH

**Associated Press**

**LOS ANGELES (AP)** — The nation's two biggest school systems — New York City and Los Angeles — received threats of a large-scale attack Tuesday, and L.A. reacted by shutting down the entire district. New York dismissed the warning as an amateurish hoax and held class as usual.

In LA, the threat came in the form of an email to a school board member that raised fears of another attack like the recent deadly shooting in nearby San Bernardino. Authorities in New York reported receiving the same "generic" email that was sent to other cities around the country. They decided

there was no danger to schoolchildren, with Mayor Bill de Blasio concluding the threat contained "nothing credible."

"It was so outlandish," he said.

New York Police Commissioner William Bratton agreed, quipping that it looked like the sender of the threat had watched a lot of the Showtime terrorism drama "Homeland."

The shutdown abruptly closed more than 900 public schools and 187 charter schools attended by 640,000 students across Los Angeles.

Los Angeles officials defended the move.

"It is very easy in hindsight to criticize a decision based on results the decider could

never have known," LA Police Chief Charlie Beck said at a news conference.

The threatening email sent to the New York City school superintendent warned that every school would be attacked with pressure cooker bombs, nerve agents and machine guns. The email claimed the writer and "138 comrades" would carry out the attack. Students "at every school in the New York City school district will be massacred, mercilessly.

And there is nothing you can do to stop it," the message said.

The anonymous writer claimed to be a student at a district high school who had been bullied.

A law enforcement official

(AP Photo/Danny Moloshok)

with access to the document provided the email to The Associated Press.

The official was not authorized to disclose details of an ongoing investigation and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The person who wrote the note also claimed to be a jihadist but made errors that suggested the writer really a prankster, including spelling the word "Allah" with a lowercase "a."

The threats came in simultaneously to New York and LA school officials at about 1:20 a.m.

EST (2000 GMT) Tuesday, or about 10:20 p.m. (1520 GMT) Monday in Los Angeles.

Continued on page 3



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## Kerry calls for common ground with Russia on Syria, Ukraine

MATTHEW LEE

AP Diplomatic Writer

MOSCOW (AP) — The United States and Russia need to find common ground to end Syria's civil war and restore stability in eastern Ukraine, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said Tuesday, as he met with Russian President Vladimir Putin to try to narrow gaps in the countries' approaches to the crises.

"Together the United States and Russia have the ability to make a significant difference here," Kerry told Putin as they began meeting at the Kremlin. Perhaps seeking to ease some tension in what were expected to be tough talks, Kerry praised Russia's role in seeking to create a political transition process for Syria with other nations, including the U.S.

"It's been a good cooperative effort, and we're very appreciative for what has been achieved so far," Kerry said. Putin offered only perfunctory comments at the start of the meeting, but noted that "together, we are looking for ways out of the most urgent crises," despite several "outstanding issues." Earlier, in talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Kerry said the world benefits when great powers agree in their approaches to major crises. "Even when there have been differences between us, we have been able to work effectively on specific issues," Kerry said. "Today, I hope we can find some common ground."

Russia and the U.S. are at odds over the mechanics of a political transition



**Russian President Vladimir Putin, right, shakes hands with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry during their meeting in the Kremlin in Moscow, Russia, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2015. The United States and Russia need to find common ground to end Syria's civil war and restore stability in eastern Ukraine, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said Tuesday, as he met with Russian President Vladimir Putin to try to narrow gaps in the countries' approaches to the crises.**

(Sergei Karpukhin/Pool Photo via AP)

aimed at halting the war in Syria, as well as the military approach to fighting the Islamic State group. The results of Tuesday's meetings will determine whether or not a new international conference on Syria will go ahead as planned Friday at the United Nations.

On Ukraine, the two countries are split over the implementation of a February agreement meant to end hostilities between the Kiev government and Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Lavrov noted "outstanding issues" with the U.S. on the Syrian political transition that is supposed to bring representatives of Syrian

President Bashar Assad's government together with the opposition for negotiations by early January. And on Ukraine, Lavrov said the U.S. should use its influence with the government in Kiev to settle the conflict with the separatists by respecting a shaky cease-fire and moving ahead with political reforms in eastern Ukraine.

Kerry praised Moscow for having been "a significant contributor to the progress that we have been able to make" on Syria and said the U.S. and Russia both believe the Islamic State group must be eliminated. "Russia and the United States agree that this is a threat to everybody, to ev-

ery country," he said. "They are the worst of terrorists. They attack culture and history and all decency. It leaves no choice but for civilized nations to stand together, to fight and destroy them."

However, ahead of his arrival, Russia's foreign ministry said Moscow would be looking for a "revision" in U.S. policy of "dividing terrorists into 'bad' and 'good' ones." It also complained that the U.S. was unwilling to engage in "full-fledged coordination" between the two powers' militaries while both are conducting airstrikes in Syria. Russia says its airstrikes since late September have targeted the Islamic State

group, but Western governments claim Moscow is bombing mostly moderate Syrian rebels and is primarily concerned with shoring up Assad.

Assad's future and his potential role in the political transition will be prime topics of Kerry's conversations with Putin and Lavrov.

Russia has consistently said Assad's future is for the Syrian people to decide, while the U.S. and many of its allies insist that he go, although they have softened their stance somewhat to allow Assad to play a temporary but as-yet undefined role in the transition. Syrian opposition groups, however, demand that Assad leave at the start of the process. After his lengthy meeting with Lavrov, Kerry took time out for a brief stroll through Moscow's Stary Arbat pedestrian shopping street, stopping at stores including a Dunkin' Donuts under a light snow and exchanging greetings with Russians. Kerry's trip to Moscow is his second to Russia this year. Since the first, President Barack Obama has seen Putin briefly twice at summits in Turkey and France. Regarding Ukraine, Kerry is asking for Russia's full implementation of a February cease-fire in exchange for sanctions relief. That truce called for the removal of heavy weaponry from front lines, a Russian troop withdrawal, the release of detainees and full access for international monitors. But the cease-fire has become increasingly strained. □

Massachusetts:

# Teen convicted in rape, killing of high school teacher

**SALEM, Massachusetts (AP)** — A teenager was convicted Tuesday of raping and killing his math teacher at a high school in the state of Massachusetts when he was 14. Philip Chism, now 16, followed his 9th grade algebra teacher, Colleen Ritzer, into a school bathroom, strangled her, stabbed her at least 16 times and raped her. Chism was convicted of a raping Ritzer inside the bathroom but was acquitted of a second rape, committed with a tree branch in woods near the school where Chism put her body. He was convicted of armed robbery for stealing Ritzer's credit cards and her underwear.

Chism stared straight ahead and did not have any visible reaction as the verdicts were being read in Salem Superior Court. During his trial, his lawyer admitted Chism killed Ritzer, but said he was suffering from severe mental illness and was not criminally responsible for his actions. A psychiatrist who testified for the defense said Chism was hearing voices and in the throes of a psychotic episode when he killed Ritzer. Ritzer, 24, was a popular teacher at Danvers High School, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) north of Boston, doing her dream job, teaching math, Assistant District Attorney Kate Mac-

Dougall told jurors in her opening statement. On Oct. 22, 2013, Ritzer asked Chism to stay after school. Another student who also stayed late that day testified that Ritzer tried to engage Chism — a student who had recently moved to Massachusetts — in light talk about how his new community compared with his old town of Clarksville, Tennessee. The student said Chism became visibly upset and Ritzer eventually changed the subject. Chism faces life in prison on the first-degree murder charge. As a juvenile, he cannot receive a life sentence without parole following decisions by the U.S.



Philip Chism appears in Salem Superior Court, Monday, Dec. 14, 2015, during closing arguments. The Massachusetts teenager who raped and killed his high school math teacher “knew right from wrong and could choose right from wrong,” a prosecutor said Monday during closing arguments in the teen’s murder trial. (Mark Lorenz/The Boston Herald via AP, Pool)

Supreme Court and the Judge David Lowy set a Supreme Judicial Court of status hearing for Dec. 22 Massachusetts. to discuss sentencing. □

Schools

Continued from Front

According to LA school police, the FBI and LAPD were contacted late Monday, which would mean within 90 minute or so of the threat coming in. The decision to close Los Angeles schools was announced at 6:25 a.m. PST, well after NYC had already concluded a hoax and kept schools open. Los Angeles Superintendent Ramon Cortines said every campus would be searched, and he asked for a report on the searches certifying that all buildings are safe. Bratton called the closure in Los Angeles a “significant overreaction.” “We cannot allow ourselves to raise levels of fear,” said Bratton, who

once ran the LA Police Department. Hours later, the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee also said the threat was believed to be a hoax. White House spokesman Josh Earnest said he would not second-guess the decisions made in Los Angeles or New York. He said the FBI has been in touch with California authorities. The decision to close the district disrupted the morning routines of many Los Angeles families. Lupita Vela, who has a daughter in the third grade and a son who is a high school senior, called the threat “absolutely terrifying” in light of the San Bernardino attack, which killed 14 people earlier this month. “I know the kids are anxious,” she said. □

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## Clinton: US needs '360-degree' anti-terror strategy

**KEN THOMAS**  
Associated Press

**MINNEAPOLIS (AP)** — Democratic presidential front-runner Hillary Clinton plans to address Tuesday the need for a "360-degree strategy" to keep the U.S. safe and prevent domestic terror attacks.

In a speech at the University of Minnesota, Clinton will address proactive steps for capping Islamic State recruitment in the U.S., especially online, and for stopping potential jihadists from training overseas, her campaign said Tuesday, previewing her remarks.

The Democratic hopeful was addressing her counterterrorism strategy hours before Republicans were holding their latest debate in Las Vegas. As President Barack Obama's former secretary of state, Clinton holds direct ties to the White House's national security policies and has largely

endorsed the president's approach to dismantling the Islamic State group. Like Obama, Clinton has said she would not send American ground troops to the Middle East, saying it would provide a recruiting tool for IS. But Republicans view Obama's handling of foreign policy and terrorism as a weakness and have tried to link Clinton to the president's record, arguing that his policies in the Middle East allowed terrorist groups to flourish since the drawdown of troops in Iraq. The former first lady is the overwhelming favorite for the 2016 Democratic nomination. She faces two rivals in the primary contest that begins in February. Clinton will also talk about ways to stop foreign fighters from coming to the U.S., discover and disrupt plots before they can be carried out, work more closely with law enforcement agen-



Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton speaks during the 2015 National Immigration Integration Conference in New York.

cies and empower Muslim-American communities, her campaign said. Clinton's campaign billed the speech as a "360-de-

gree strategy to keep America safe." She sought to reassure Americans that she would keep the homeland safe in the aftermath of high-profile attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California, incidents that have thrust terrorism to the forefront of the presi-

dential campaign. Clinton planned to say the nation needs a comprehensive strategy to address every step in the process that could lead to an attack like the one that occurred in San Bernardino, including recruitment, training, planning and execution. □

(AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

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## US envoy: Raid in May led to plans to attack IS oil targets

**ROBERT BURNS**

**AP National Security Writer**  
WASHINGTON (AP) — A U.S. military raid that killed an Islamic State leader in Syria last spring yielded intelligence that allowed the U.S. to more effectively target the extremist group's oil revenues, the State Department's top diplomat for energy affairs said Tuesday. Amos Hochstein, a special envoy and coordinator for international energy affairs, told reporters at the Pentagon that the raid by U.S. special operations forces in May was a key to building a military and diplomatic plan to hit the extremists' most important source of income. The raid killed Abu Sayyaf,

who was known as the Islamic State's oil emir. Sayyaf's wife, an Iraqi known as Umm Sayyaf, was captured. U.S. officials have said she was cooperative during interrogations and provided significant amounts of useful intelligence. She is now in Iraqi custody.

"With that raid we got this enormous amount of information that was very detailed as to how they operated their energy sector and allowed us to learn more about the operation and how to attack it or address it," Hochstein said. It enabled the U.S. to "put together the picture" of the most effective way to attack the group's oil infrastructure in Syria, he said. □

## Freddie Gray jurors deadlocked, judge says keep deliberating

JULIET LINDERMAN  
DAVID DISHNEAU  
Associated Press

**BALTIMORE (AP)** — Jurors said they were deadlocked Tuesday as they weighed manslaughter and other charges against a police officer in the death of Freddie Gray. The judge told them to keep deliberating and they went home for the night without reaching a verdict. The jury sent a note to Baltimore Circuit Judge Barry Williams after about nine hours of discussions over two days. They are deliberating in the trial of Officer William Porter, the first of six officers to stand trial on charges stemming from Gray's death in April.

As the jury deliberated, armored vehicles and police were stationed around the city ahead of any verdict, and city and state officials promised they were prepared to prevent the unrest and rioting that saw parts of the city burned and looted last spring.

It was the fifth note the jury had sent the judge Tuesday. They had earlier requested highlighters, an easel and sticky notes, suggesting they were taking a businesslike approach to assessing Porter's role in the arrest and death of Gray.

The jury also received a set of external computer speakers to improve the sound quality of recordings in evidence, including Porter's videotaped interview with Baltimore police detectives, police radio transmissions on the day Gray was arrested and cellphone videos made at two of the wagon's six stops, starting with Gray's arrest.

The panel spent three hours deliberating Monday. Porter faces charges of manslaughter, assault, reckless endangerment and misconduct. If convicted of all charges, he could face 25 years in prison.

The judge refused a jury request for the clerk's list of trial exhibits, since the list isn't evidence, and denied defense motions for a mistrial and change of trial location. The latter



Deputy State's Attorney Janice Bledsoe, left, walks to a courthouse before a jury continues deliberations on the case of William Porter, one of six Baltimore city police officers charged in connection to the death of Freddie Gray, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2015, in Baltimore.

(AP Photo/Patrick Semansky)

two requests were part of a motion seeking ask jurors if they've seen a letter the city schools chief sent home with children Monday, warning of consequences for violent responses to any verdict.

Williams said it wouldn't be appropriate to query the jury about the letter.

In closing arguments Monday, prosecutors said Porter could have save Gray's life with two clicks: one to buckle him in with a seat belt and another to summon medical help with his police radio. Defense lawyers said Porter was not to blame for Gray's death.

Gray died April 19, a week after his neck was broken while he was in the back of the van with wrists and ankles shackled. The autopsy concluded that the injury probably came as Gray was slammed against a wall during cornering or braking.

"Is two, three, four seconds worth a life?" prosecutor Janice Bledsoe asked the jury Monday.

Jurors must determine whether they believe prosecutors, who say Porter's indifference makes him criminally responsible for Gray's injury, or the defense characterization of Porter as a conscientious officer who told supervisors to bring take Gray to the hospital. □

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## Rate Hike: Fed betting it will avoid errors of the past

PAN PYLAS

Associated Press

**LONDON (AP)** — The Federal Reserve is poised to raise interest rates Wednesday for the first time in 9½ years. It may not take so long to know whether its decision was correct.

History is filled with cases, from the Fed in the 1930s to the European Central Bank in 2011, when central banks raised rates prematurely, sometimes with dire consequences. Raising rates or otherwise tightening credit too soon can slow borrowing, jolt confidence and choke growth. When the global financial system started buckling in 2007, central banks cut rates to fight the worst economic catastrophe since the 1930s. As the crisis escalated in late 2008, many rates were slashed to record lows. The Fed cut its benchmark rate to near zero.

Mindful of the risks of higher rates and of the U.S. economy's lingering weaknesses, some economists have suggested that the Fed could wait a bit longer before raising rates, especially with inflation still low amid slumping oil and commodity prices. In a survey of top academic economists, the University of Chicago found that while 48 percent favored a rate hike, 36 percent felt the Fed should hold off.

Andrew Levin of Dartmouth College is among those who think the Fed is acting too soon.

"The economy is not that close to normal yet," Levin says. "Inflation has been persistently falling short of the Fed's target."

Levin notes, too, that while the unemployment rate is a low 5 percent, millions without jobs have given up looking for one. Levin says employers would have to add 200,000 jobs a month for at least another year to restore the job market's health.

For any central bank, the hardest task is to continually straddle a delicate balance:

Keeping rates too low for



**In this 1937 photo, Paul G. Hallett, 25, as he wears a sign stating his situation and qualifications as he looks for a job in Spokane, Wash. The US economy took a turn for the worse in 1937, with many blaming tighter Fed policy and a tougher budget stance by the government for the deterioration. On Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2015, the US Federal Reserve is expected to raise interest rates for the first time since 2006.**

(AP Photo)

too long can inflate asset bubbles as investors seek returns that are higher — but riskier — than returns on government debt. Low rates can also weaken the ability of central banks to combat a new crisis or recession.

But equally, central bankers must take care not to increase rates too soon. Since the global financial crisis, several central banks, from Israel's to New Zealand's, have raised rates only to have to reverse course soon after.

Chair Janet Yellen summed it up in a speech Dec. 2. Yellen said delaying a first increase too long might later compel the Fed to raise rates faster than it would like.

"An abrupt tightening would risk disrupting financial markets and perhaps even inadvertently push the economy into recession," she said. "Holding the federal funds rate at

its current level for too long could also encourage excessive risk-taking and thus undermine financial stability."

In 1936-37, during the Great Depression era, the Fed sought to normalize its policies by increasing the amount of money banks had to hold as reserves. Many blame that decision, along with a tougher budgetary stance from the U.S. government, for helping prolong the Depression. The economy fell back into a brutal recession in which around 2.5 million Americans lost jobs.

By 1938, President Franklin Roosevelt reverted back to the expansionist policies associated with the New Deal that he had been implementing since 1933. And the Fed rescinded the increased reserve requirement. The economy then enjoyed a spectacular recovery, helped by wartime spending. □

## Merriam-Webster declares 'ism' as the word of the year for 2015

LEANNE ITALIE

Associated Press

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Merriam-Webster has picked a small but powerful suffix as word of the year: ism.

But not just any ism. The top isms to earn high traffic spikes and big bumps in lookups on the dictionary company's website in 2015 over the year before are socialism, fascism, racism, feminism, communism, capitalism and terrorism.

"We had a lot on our minds this year," mused Peter Sokolowski, the Springfield, Massachusetts-based company's editor at large, in a recent interview. "It's a serious year. These are words of ideas and practices. We're educating ourselves."

Pinpointing reasons why words go on the run at Merriam-Webster is an educated guess. The dictionary company tracks corresponding news events to link lookups to real life. And its researchers also crunch data in a way that filters out common words frequently looked up year after year when making their top annual choices. Lookups for fascism corresponded to release of video in November showing a white police officer shooting a black teenager in Chicago, and the criminal charges that followed. Merriam-Webster also saw a stronger correlation in heavy traffic on its site for that word and "fascist" and flash points in Republican Donald Trump's presidential campaign, including reports on his anti-Islam rhetoric. The isms often collide, driving each other in popularity, Sokolowski said.

"Fascism we more closely associate as the response to various acts of terrorism. After the attacks in Paris and the attacks in Colorado Springs and in San Bernardino, and because of Donald Trump's proposal to ban Muslims, we then see the word fas-

cism spike," he said.

Lookups of racism were high all year but had two noticeable spikes, one after the South Carolina church shootings and another amid the University of Missouri protests.

Sokolowski, a lexicographer by training, said one spike in lookups for feminism came in April and corresponded with reports on an Ohio middle school student who wore a T-shirt with the word printed on it in a school photo, only to have it digitally blacked out by school administrators. The school later apologized.

Reports on Caitlyn Jenner, Amy Schumer and Hillary Clinton all included discussion of feminism, as did reviews of the film "Mad Max: Fury Road" and chatter about previews of "Star Wars: The Force Awakens."

In addition, Emma Watson's 2014 UN speech made the news again twice this year; first for inspiring Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai to call herself a feminist in a viral video, and again when it was revealed that Watson was asked not to use the word at all in the speech, Sokolowski noted. The word socialism has Bernie Sanders to thank for its popularity.

"The big spikes have been associated with the fact that we have a presidential candidate who identifies as a Democratic Socialist," Sokolowski said. "We saw that even though socialism was in the Top 10 of the most looked-up words in the whole history of the site, it increased in a spike beginning in late July when Bernie Sanders had a multicity rally that was organized through social media and attracted about 100,000 people in 3,000 communities or more around the country."

In October, lookups for socialism spiked again during the first Democratic debate featuring Sanders and Clinton. □



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**US Financial Front:**

**Consumer prices unchanged but core inflation moves up**

**MARTIN CRUTSINGER**  
**AP Economics Writer**  
**WASHINGTON (AP)** — U.S. consumer prices were unchanged in November as declines in energy and food held down overall costs. But core inflation was up 2 percent over the 12 months ending in November. That was the fastest pace in more than a year and the kind of increase Fed officials want to see to justify the start of a round of interest rate increases. The flat reading for consumer prices last month followed a modest 0.2 percent increase in October and outright declines in August and September, the Labor Department reported Tuesday. Core inflation, which excludes energy and food, was up 0.2 percent in November and has risen 2 percent over the past 12 months, the fastest gain since a similar 2 percent rise for the 12 months ending in May 2014. Over the past year, overall inflation has risen just 0.5 percent. Overall prices are being held back by a sharp fall in energy costs and a stronger dollar, which makes imports cheaper. Fed Chair Janet Yellen has said she expects both of those impacts will soon start to fade and because of that she expects overall inflation will start rising back to the Fed's 2 percent target. Private economists said Fed officials, who were holding their final meeting of the year on Tuesday and Wednesday, are likely to use the rise in core prices as justification to support a quarter-point rate hike at this meeting, the first rate increase in nearly a decade. Paul Ashworth, chief U.S. economist at Capital Economics, said he expects rising inflation will prompt

the Fed to raise its key interest rate to near 2 percent by this time next year. This rate has been at a record low near zero for the past seven years. Other economists are predicting a much more gradual rise in rates of less than half that amount to around 1 percent for the Fed's benchmark federal funds rate. Overall energy costs fell 1.3 percent in November, led by a 2.4 percent drop in gasoline pump prices, the third decline in gasoline costs in the past four months. Nationwide gas prices now stand at \$2.01 per gallon, according to AAA's Daily Fuel Gauge. That is down from \$2.56 a year ago. In some parts of the country, gas is already below \$2 per gallon. Food costs retreated 0.1 percent in November, the first monthly decline since March. The price of meats, poultry, fish and eggs dropped for the third month in a row. Meanwhile, prices rose in some categories. Medical care climbed 0.4 percent, and airline fares grew 1.2 percent. Ian Shepherdson, chief economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, said the increase in medical costs reflected in part a jump in the cost of health insurance, with premiums up 3.6 percent over the past 12 months, compared to a 1 percent drop in premium costs for the 12 months ending in November 2014. Jennifer Lee, senior economist at BMO Capital Economics, said the low overall inflation would not stop the Fed from starting to raise interest rates, given the long-held view that if the Fed waits to start raising interest rates until inflation becomes a problem, then it will have waited too long. □



A shopper looks in the window of an ALDO store in the Mall in Robinson Township, Pa. The Labor Department reported on consumer prices for November 2015 and issue a report on Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2015. (AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar)



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# Saudi Arabia creates Islamic bloc to fight terror groups

**AYA BATRAWY**  
**ADAM SCHRECK**  
**Associated Press**

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — Projecting its ambition for regional leadership, Saudi Arabia said Tuesday it has lined up most of the Arab world, NATO member Turkey and several African and Asian countries behind a vaguely defined “Islamic military alliance” against terrorists.

The move allows the kingdom, which follows a deeply conservative interpretation of Islam, to cast itself as a leader in the fight against extremism.

But absent from the alliance are the Shiite-led countries of Iran and Iraq, as well as Syria, whose government is backed by Tehran. And that omission raises questions about whether the 34-member bloc is primarily intended to present a unified front against extremists — or to also serve as a Sunni deterrent to Iran, Saudi Arabia’s main regional rival.

Riyadh supports rebels fighting to overthrow Syrian President Bashar Assad and has been leading an Arab coalition against Iran-supported Shiite Houthi rebels in Yemen since March. It is also part of the U.S.-led coalition fighting Islamic State militants in Syria and Iraq. The announcement on



**Saudi Arabia’s foreign minister Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir holds a press conference Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2015 in Paris. Saudi Arabia said Tuesday that 34 nations have agreed to form a new “Islamic military alliance” to fight terrorism with a joint operations center based in the kingdom, but the coalition does not include Shiite-majority Iran or Iraq, and it’s not clear how exactly it would function. (AP Photo/Christophe Ena)**

state media said the Saudi-led alliance is being established because terrorism “should be fought by all means.”

Deputy Crown Prince and Defense Minister Mohammed bin Salman said at a rare news conference that the bloc will develop mechanisms for working with other countries and international bodies to support counterterrorism efforts.

Their efforts would not be limited to countering the

Islamic State group, he added.

Though few details were given, the statement said the alliance would not just be countering Sunni extremists but protecting Muslim nations from all terrorists “whatever their doctrine.”

When asked if this meant the alliance would also counter Shiite militants, the Saudi defense minister replied the coalition would fight terrorist groups “regardless of their categorization,” particularly in Syria

and Iraq, where he said there will be cooperation with the international community.

The U.S. and its allies have trained militarily with the Gulf states and other friendly countries in the region for years, encouraging them to work more closely together.

Last year, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states joined the U.S. in carrying out airstrikes in Syria against the Islamic State, also known as ISIS and ISIL. Many of the Arab

countries in the new Saudi-led coalition are part of that existing alliance against IS, though their contributions have waned since March, with Gulf efforts diverted to the Yemen offensive.

The Saudi endeavor appeared to catch some in Washington off-guard. A senior defense official said the U.S. did not know in advance about the plan for the alliance and that officials were working to find out details. The official was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter, visiting Incerlik Air Base in Turkey, said: “In general, at least, it appears that it’s very much aligned with something that we’ve been urging for quite some time, which is greater involvement in the campaign to combat ISIL by Sunni Arab countries.”

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said the alliance wouldn’t be a substitute or a replacement for the U.S.-led coalition fighting IS militants, noting the Saudi effort was intended to focus on broader targets. The Saudis have made “important contributions” to the anti-IS coalition led by Washington, “and we anticipate that they will continue to do so,” he said. □

# Dozens killed, hurt in airstrikes on fuel market in Syria

**BASSEM MROUE**  
**Associated Press**

**BEIRUT (AP)** — Airstrikes on a fuel market in a rebel-held village in northern Syria killed and wounded dozens on Tuesday and destroyed several tanker trucks, two Syrian opposition monitoring groups reported.

Opposition activists said warplanes also struck a

popular market in the northern village of Maskaneh that is under the control of the Islamic State group, killing at least 18 people and wounding many others.

It was not immediately clear whose warplanes carried out the strikes, although the monitoring groups said the Russians targeted both markets.

The fuel market in the village of Maaret al-Naasan mostly sells diesel brought from areas under the control of the Islamic State group. The airstrikes on the market are likely part of a campaign to target the oil trade that is a major source of income for IS. The extremist group controls nearly half of Syria.

Russian warplanes as well as those of the U.S.-led coalition have destroyed hundreds of tanker trucks that are used to ferry oil from fields under the control of IS in eastern Syria to other parts of the country. The warplanes have also struck oil facilities in the eastern province of Deir el-Zour in recent weeks.

The Local Coordination Committees said Tuesday’s airstrikes on Maaret al-Naasan were carried out by Russian warplanes and that they killed and wounded dozens of people.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the airstrikes killed 16 and wounded dozens more. □



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## Sovereignty battle looms as EU unveils border guard scheme



Macedonian Army engineers build a fence at the border crossing Medzitlija, between Macedonia and Greece, near the southern Macedonian town of Bitola. Macedonia is erecting another several kilometers long fence near town of Bitola, on its southern border with neighboring Greece, in order to prevent illegal crossings and to channel the flow of migrants through the official checkpoint near the southern town of Gevgelija, where only migrants from the war-affected zones will be allowed to enter.

(AP Photo/Boris Grdanoski)

LORNE COOK  
Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Commission has unveiled a controversial plan for a European border guard agency that would

deploy to member states overwhelmed by migrants — whether those nations want it or not.

The new agency would have a standing reserve force of at least 1,500 bor-

der guards that could be sent to EU border chokepoints within three days, rather than relying on time-consuming calls to nations for volunteers during emergencies.

### Greece:

## New austerity bill changing loan rules approved

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Greek lawmakers on Tuesday approved legislation granting the right to sell bad business loans from local banks to overseas funds as part of a new austerity bill demanded by bailout lenders from the rest of the eurozone.

All 153 members of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras' left-led coalition voted in favor of the draft legislation, while all 138 opposition lawmakers present rejected it, and nine were absent from the vote.

The changes will only affect larger businesses and follow months of pressure from lenders as the number of non-performing loans

in the Greek market rose above 40 percent.

The legislation was set as a condition for the release of the next loan installment of 1 billion euros (\$1.1 billion).

Other provisions in the bill include a new pay scale for civil servants, while plans to partially privatize the national power grid operator, ADMIE, were delayed until next year.

Labor unions, which oppose the reforms, staged two separate, peaceful protest marches in central Athens late Tuesday. Nearly 2,000 people in total participated.

Tsipras' coalition, which suffered the defection of two lawmakers in a previ-

ous vote on creditor-demanded reforms, still faces a major hurdle next month, when the government has pledged to legislate unpopular pension reforms and hikes in taxation for farmers.

Greece has depended on international rescue loans since it nearly went bankrupt in 2010. Tsipras first came to power in January, pledging to reverse resented austerity measures creditors sought in return for the loans, but he was forced a few months later to sign yet another bailout with further tough cutbacks. Nevertheless, he won a second four-year term in early elections held in September. □

"This is a safety net, which like all safety nets, we hope will never need to be used," European Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans told EU lawmakers on Tuesday.

The plan is contentious because it requires countries to surrender some of their sovereignty — something many have viscerally opposed so far — and it's unclear whether the scheme will win enough backing among the bloc's 28 members to pass. EU leaders will discuss it for the first time at a two-day summit beginning Thursday.

The proposal is just the start of a potentially long and divisive legislative process. Still, the EU has planned a 2016 budget for the agency of 238 million euros (\$260

million). According to the International Organization for Migration, more than 920,000 people have entered the EU so far this year. The influx has overwhelmed national border guards and reception capacities, notably in Greece, where some 770,000 migrants have arrived, most of them from Turkey.

Greece has struggled to respond, sparking anger among its European partners as unregistered migrants move further north.

The border and coast guard would monitor EU borders to the outside world — like Greece's — and have the right to send border guards, ships, planes or other assets when a country is unable or unwilling to enforce border laws. □

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# Yemen peace talks underway as some rebels ignore cease-fire



Members of the media wait in front of the Olympia house where peace talks on Yemen are being held in the village of Magglingen, in Switzerland, Dec. 15, 2015. Expectations are low for the U.N.-brokered peace talks between Yemen's internationally recognized government and the country's Shiite rebels that started on Tuesday with the difficulty of the task underscored by rebel fighters' failure to honor a weeklong cease-fire in some parts of the country, Yemeni officials said.

(Marcel Bieri/Keystone via AP)

**JAMEY KEATEN  
AHMED AL-HAJ**  
Associated Press

**GENEVA (AP)** — U.N.-brokered peace talks between Yemen's internationally recognized government and Shiite rebels

opened Tuesday in Switzerland with expectations of a deal low as fighters failed to honor a weeklong cease-fire in some parts of the country.

The truce, scheduled to start at noon on Tuesday,

was meant to give the warring factions a chance to find a solution to the conflict that has engulfed the Arab world's poorest country. Airstrikes by a Saudi-led coalition targeting the rebels were halted, but

security officials said rebel shelling and ground clashes continued in southwestern Taiz province.

Yemen has been torn by fighting pitting the rebels, known as Houthis, and army units loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh against forces of the internationally recognized government, which is backed by the Saudi-led coalition and supported by the United States, as well as southern separatists, religious extremists and other militants.

According to U.N. figures, the war in Yemen has killed at least 5,884 people since March, when the fighting escalated after the Saudi-led coalition began launching airstrikes targeting the rebels.

In a statement, the U.N. special envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, emphasized the urgency of the talks in Switzerland — the latest in a series of negotiations and cease-fires that have so far failed to end the fighting.

"The people of Yemen are daily, indeed hourly,

anticipating the outcome of these discussions. This meeting is their only glimmer of hope and must not be extinguished," the envoy said. "The tongues of fire, the scenes of destruction, the reverberation of bombs and the soaring prices have turned their daily lives into a series of ongoing tragedies."

Previous efforts to end the violence have ended in failure, as the government insisted the Houthis comply with a U.N. resolution that requires them to hand over weapons and withdraw from territory they captured over the past year, including the capital, Sanaa. The Houthis have demanded the country's political future be decided through negotiations.

In the past, the rebels have said they are willing to honor the U.N. resolution but did not specify to whom they would hand over weapons and territory. Yemen's civil war has divided the armed forces, which have units loyal to ousted president Saleh, a Houthi ally, and others who answer to the internationally recognized government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

Negotiations were taking place at the Swiss Olympic House in the village of Macolin, a training center for elite athletes. On Tuesday, police armed with automatic weapons were on patrol outside the facility, which was cordoned off with metal barriers requiring journalists to keep about 50 yards (meters) away. The talks, which could go on for days, were shrouded in secrecy. □

## Man arrested, held for questioning over Paris attacks

**ELAINE GANLEY**  
Associated Press

**PARIS (AP)** — Police arrested a 29-year-old man on Tuesday and held him for questioning about the Nov. 13 Paris attacks, officials said.

The prosecutor's office said the man was arrested in the morning at his home in Villiers-sur-Marne, a far-flung eastern suburb of Paris.

The spokeswoman for the

prosecutor's office, Agnes Thibault-Lecuire, refused to identify the man or provide further information about his suspected links to the attacks that killed 130 people. Two police officials who confirmed the arrest also gave no further details.

The man arrested Tuesday can be held for questioning for up to six days before being charged or freed. Two people have been

placed under investigation in France and more than a half-dozen in Belgium in connection with the attacks. France moved into a state of emergency after the attacks, which were claimed by the Islamic State group. The coordinated attacks targeted a noted music hall, restaurants and cafes and the main sports stadium, and left hundreds wounded in addition to the dead.

Police in France and Belgium, where the attackers began their journey, are sweeping wide to find those behind it.

Police are still investigating two January attacks around Paris that killed 17 people. The Paris prosecutor's office said two people have been arrested in that case on suspicion of helping provide guns to the man who attacked a kosher supermarket. □

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Tourists have been visiting the wonderful island of Aruba since the late 1940's, enjoying the pristine beaches, clear waters and Aruba's dynamic nightlife. But one of the most unique experiences you, and your skin, will certainly appreciate for years to come, is visiting the world famous Aruba Aloe Balm Plantation, Factory and Museum. You will learn about the rich history of Aloe Vera, its importance to Aruba's economy, and the healing properties of this miracle plant.

### The Aloe Vera Plant, a brief history.



Aloe Vera's healing properties were discovered centuries ago and it has been used as an ingredient in medications throughout the world by many different cultures ever since. The plant was introduced in Aruba in the mid 1800's, and because of the perfect weather conditions for the plant to grow in; Aruba became one of the largest exporters of Aloe Vera products in the world earning the nickname "Island of Aloe". Aloe has proven to be so important to the local economy that the plant is even shown in the code of arms of Aruba. Aloe Vera nowadays tops the list as one of the most powerful moisturizers and hydrating remedies available and Aruban aloe is known to be the best in the world.



### The Aruba Aloe Balm Factory and Museum Tour:

Founded in 1890, Aruba Aloe Balm is one of the oldest companies in Aruba and the only company that still grows and processes Aloe on the island. By visiting this iconic landmark and plantation, you will learn about the plant's rich history and about how Aruba Aloe makes its world famous skin care products.

During the tour, the super friendly local staff will guide you through the process of how they grow, hand cut and process the products that are sold worldwide. You will also get a guided tour of the museum that serves as a national depository for ancient aloe tools and equipment as well as a complete library on the history, manufacturing and healing qualities of Aloe.

### Laura & Dominio Bucciero, from Napels Italy on their honeymoon:

"First time in Aruba, we are here for our honeymoon and staying for a week. The tour is very interesting, even though I don't perfectly understand English. We have Aloe in Italy but there it's not such good quality as the Aloe here. I have purchased the hand and body lotion because I don't really sunburn but still want very smooth and hydrated skin." If you want to experience this unique and authentic experience come visit us during your stay here on Aruba! The FREE tour & museum are open **Monday thru Friday from 8 am. to 5 pm. and Saturday from 9 am. – 5 pm.** If you are interested in learning more about Aruba Aloe products you can also visit [www.arubaaloe.com](http://www.arubaaloe.com). We hope to see you soon!

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## Brazilian police search house speaker's homes in graft probe



Brazil's Lower House President Eduardo Cunha gets into his car after meeting with congressional allies at his home, following a federal police raid on his residence in Brasilia, Brazil, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2015. (AP Photo/Eraldo Peres)

**BRAD BROOKS**  
Associated Press

**RIO DE JANEIRO (AP)** — Brazil's federal police carried out sweeping raids Tuesday in the homes and

offices of top political figures ensnared in a massive corruption investigation. Among the targets was the speaker of the nation's lower house, who earlier

this month introduced impeachment proceedings against President Dilma Rousseff. Dep. Eduardo Cunha is a bitter nemesis of Rousseff and faces federal charges of corruption for allegedly accepting at least \$5 million in bribes linked to a sprawling kick-back scandal at state-run oil company Petrobras.

As speaker of the house, Cunha had the power to allow the impeachment process against the president to begin. Her government is accused of fiscal irregularities by using funds from state-run banks to cover budget gaps.

Cunha for months has been the leader's biggest congressional roadblock to passing austerity measures to jumpstart the moribund economy and other legislation.

The push against Cunha and several high-ranking members of his powerful party, which is split into pro- and anti-Rousseff camps despite serving as the ruling Workers' Party's strongest coalition partner since it took power in 2003, is seen as a political boost for Rousseff.

"This weakens the whole impeachment process because there will be even

more fragmentation in Congress," said Francisco Fonseca, a political science professor at the Getulio Vargas Foundation university in Sao Paulo.

Fonseca noted that protests this past weekend that called for Rousseff's impeachment were far weaker than previous rallies against her, and that while "the economy might be affected by the political turmoil in the short run ... it's important to show that Brazilian institutions" like federal police and prosecutors are independently doing their jobs, regardless of the poisonous political atmosphere. Cunha, who told reporters on Tuesday that he's "totally innocent," has said the millions investigators found in Swiss bank accounts and linked to him was made through business dealings, was not the only figure caught up in the raids, which saw police confiscating phones, computers, documents and other items but as yet not arresting anyone.

Also targeted were two government ministers and a senator from Cunha's Brazil Democratic Movement Party, known as the PMDB. Rousseff's Vice President Michel Temer is the

head of the PMDB and, should she be impeached, would take the presidency. Cunha's fate as speaker of the lower house is being determined by an ethics committee of that body, which may rule this week on whether he should step down. Speaking in Brasilia, Cunha lashed out on Tuesday saying that the police action was prompted by his stand against Rousseff, and that "everybody knows" that the Workers' Party "is responsible for this assault on Brazil, for the assault on Petrobras."

Social Communications Minister Edinho Silva insisted "this has nothing to do with party politics."

"This tends to raise the political instability," he acknowledged, speaking at a news conference. "That is never positive. But these facts have to be investigated." Meanwhile, the Supreme Court could rule this week on the legality of how a special impeachment committee was formed last week in the House of Deputies. By Cunha's decree, it was created without any debate and by secret ballot, and so far its members are predominantly in favor of impeaching Rousseff. □



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### Colombia:

## Rebels take another step toward ending conflict

**HAVANA (AP)** — Colombia's government and the country's largest rebel group are taking another major step toward reaching a peace deal.

Negotiators from two sides say they've successfully finished talks on how to address the needs of 6 million victims of the half-century conflict. Measures include

reparations and the rebuilding of infrastructure in communities most damaged by fighting.

With Monday's announcement, there's a single unsettled issue: How members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia will demobilize in order for both sides to reach a final deal.

Momentum to conclude the 3-year-old talks has been building since September, when President Juan Manuel Santos and FARC leader Rodrigo Londono announced an agreement on how to punish rebels who confess war crimes. Details of that accord were also unveiled Tuesday. □



## Aruba Aloe Offers the “Cunuco Bag” & Much More This Holiday Season



**PALM BEACH** - The approaching holiday season brings excitement and joy, but it can also bring stress—so many loved ones to buy gifts for and so little time! Aruba Aloe aims to take the stress out of your shopping by providing a wide range of products that will appeal to just about everybody on your list. Additionally, Aruba Aloe's products make especially meaningful gifts that embody the island's rich history and culture.

For the holiday season, Aruba Aloe has designed

a special gift bag (5 USD) called the “Cunuco Bag,” giving the customer the opportunity to create their own unique gift set based on their special one's preferences. The Cunuco Bag design reflects the natural and cultural aspects of Aruba's heritage, such as the aloe plant, the traditional cunuco house, the “cabishi” (raised wooden box that collected the aloe), and the divi-divi tree. The bag is made of linen, so it can be reused or kept as a collector's item.

When creating their per-

sonalized gift set, a client is free to choose from Aruba Aloe's incredibly diverse selection of health and beauty products, including hand creams, face creams, body lotions, sun care, sun aftercare, shampoos, conditioners, and so

much more. Lines include Island Remedy (containing herbal extracts), Desert Bloom (aromatherapy collection), and the much-loved Aruba Aloe Collection. Of course, all products contain 100% Pure Aloe Vera Gel, extracted from the aloe plants growing in the 125-year-old fields surrounding Aruba Aloe's factory facility in Hato.

Aruba Aloe is also proud to be offering its newest

collection this holiday season—Bon Jabon, which is a vegan, gluten-free, and paraben-free soap collection made with Aloe Vera and featuring a variety of fruity sensations. The collection is crafted at the Bon Jabon factory located in downtown Oranjestad. Add a soap or two to your Cunuco Bag gift set or have a few on hand for those holiday visitors who pop in unexpectedly! □



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## The Aruba Marriott Resort Cup 2015 Kicks Off With a Great Match between Noord Football College and RCA



**PALM BEACH** - The Aruba Marriott Resort Cup 2015 kicked off recently with an exciting match between the youngsters of Noord Football College and RCA. As one of the sponsors of the Noord Football College team, the Aruba Marriott Resort was thrilled to carry the name of the competition as it is a perfect way to have the teams experience the real feel of an actual match, stimulating teamwork while also applying all the techniques they learned during trainings. To kick off the Aruba Marriott Resort Cup 2015, Mr. Tom Calame, Complex GM of the Aruba Marriott, was present to wish the teams good luck and do the official opening with



the first kick-off of the first match. The matches are taking place during this week at the Centro Deportivo Frans Figaroa starting at 5PM, with finals taking place on Friday, 18 Dec 2015. The participating teams are Noord Football College, RCA, Estrella and Eagle Sport Club. □

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## Loyal Visitors Honored by ATA at the Marriott Ocean Club

**PALM BEACH** - Recently the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure of honoring a group of loyal and friendly visitors of Aruba at the Marriott Ocean Club as Distinguished Visitors. The symbolic honorary title is presented in the name of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation to guests who visit Aruba for 10-to-19 consecutive years.

The honorees were Mr. Ira and Mrs. Karen Forman of New York, Mr. David and Mrs. Lynn Frey of New York, and Mr. Frank and Mrs. Francine Sperduto of New Jersey. All of the honorees are loyal guests of the Marriott Ocean Club and they love Aruba very much because of the friendly people, the weather, the beaches, the restaurants, the Casinos, and just about everything else! They say Aruba feels like a second home where the people are like family to them, and the Marriott Ocean Club is truly their 'home-away-from-home.' The certificates were presented by Ms. Marouska Heyliger representing the Aruba Tourism Authority together with family and friends from the Marriott Ocean Club. □



# Loyal Visitors Honored at the Renaissance Ocean Suites

**PALM BEACH** - Recently the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure of honoring a pair of loyal and friendly visitors of Aruba at the Renaissance Ocean Suites as Goodwill Ambassadors. The symbolic honorary title is presented in the name of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation to guests who visit Aruba for 20-to-34 consecutive years. The honorees were Mrs. Santa L. Rivera and Mrs. Ada L. Baez of Jackson Heights, New York. These ladies are loyal guests of the Renaissance Ocean Suites and they love Aruba very much because of the friendly people, the weather, the beaches, the restaurants, the Casinos, and just about everything



else! They say Aruba feels like a second home where the people are like family to them, and the Renaissance Ocean Suites is truly their 'home-away-from-home.'

The certificates were presented by Ms. Darline de Cuba representing the Aruba Tourism Authority together with Ms. Belinda and Ms. Liliana from the Renaissance Ocean Suites. □

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# Beckham, Giants Eliminate Dolphins From NFL Playoff Picture

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## HOMECOMING

Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder Yasiel Puig, right, hugs his former coach Juan Arechavaleta as he arrives to Hotel Nacional in Havana, Cuba, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2015. A lineup of Cuban baseball superstars including some of the most famous defectors in recent memory made a triumphant return Tuesday as part of the first Major League Baseball trip to the island since 1999. "I'm very happy to be here," said Puig, who had been barred from returning to Cuba until he was granted special permission for this week's trip.

(AP Photo/Desmond Boylan)

## Triumphant Return for Cuban Baseball Defectors Puig, Abreu

**M. WEISSENSTEIN**  
Associated Press

**HAVANA (AP)** — A lineup of Cuban-born baseball stars, including some of the most famous defectors in recent memory, made a triumphant return Tuesday as part of the first Major League Baseball trip to the island since 1999.

Long the object of official disdain in Cuba for leav-

ing the country illegally, Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder Yasiel Puig, White Sox first baseman Jose Abreu and shortstop Alexei Ramirez and St. Louis Cardinals catcher Brayan Pena were swarmed by star-struck fans and members of the state media in the lobby of Havana's soaring Hotel Nacional at the start of a three-day mission meant to warm

relations between MLB and Cuba. The high-profile, official return of baseball defectors earning tens of millions of dollars a year in the Major Leagues was a landmark in Cuba's relationship with the hundreds of players who have abandoned their country that trained them. The trip is part of a rapid warming in relations between the Major League

and Cuban baseball that has taken place since Presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro declared a year ago Thursday that they were moving to re-establishment diplomatic relations. Puig, who fled to Mexico in a smuggler's fast-boat in 2012 and then crossed the border to Texas, wrapped his childhood coach Juan Arechavaleta

in a bear-hug, resting the side of his face atop the smaller man's head.

"I'm very happy to be here," said Puig, who signed a seven-year, \$42 million contract and was barred from returning to Cuba until he was granted special permission for this week's trip.

Continued on Page 19

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## Beckham scores 2 TDs to help Giants beat Dolphins 31-24

**MIAMI GARDENS, Florida (AP)** — The New York Giants forged a three-way tie atop the NFC East division by winning 31-24 at Miami on Monday, with Odell Beckham Jr.'s 84-yard touchdown reception putting the visitors ahead to stay with 11 minutes to go. New York quarterback Eli Manning completed 27 of 31 passes for 337 yards and four scores. His passer rating of 151.5 was his highest since 2009. The Giants (6-7) broke a three-game losing streak and are tied with Washington and Philadelphia for the lead in the mediocre division. The Dolphins (5-8) were mathematically eliminated from the playoff race, extending their postseason drought to a franchise-worst seven consecutive years. The Dolphins topped 20 points for the first time since October, but couldn't keep up with Beckham, who had seven catches for 166 yards and two scores. The 100-yard



New York Giants wide receiver Odell Beckham (13) makes a catch as Miami Dolphins cornerback Brent Grimes (21) defends, during the first half of an NFL football game, Monday, Dec. 14, 2015, in Miami Gardens, Fla. (AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee)

game was his sixth in a row, a Giants record. Beckham missed one series

when he went to the locker room due to cramping, but didn't let that slow him

down. And with the score 24-24, he took advantage of broken coverage to

score the go-ahead touchdown. Cornerback Jamar Taylor and seldom-used safety Shamiel Gary were the closest defenders, but Manning hit Beckham in stride at midfield and he sprinted to the end zone for his 12th TD this year. Earlier, Beckham made a 45-yard reception to set up a touchdown and had a 5-yard scoring catch. The latter pass was initially ruled incomplete because Beckham was out of bounds, but the decision was overturned by a replay review that made the score 24-24. His final catch, a diving grab on third down at midfield, sealed the victory with less than two minutes left. Miami quarterback Ryan Tannehill threw for 236 yards and went deep to Kenny Stills for a 47-yard score that had put Miami ahead 24-17. But Tannehill overthrew an open Landry with his team trailing and less than five minutes to go. □

## Shiffrin unsure how long she will be out with injury

**PAT GRAHAM**  
AP Sports Writer

Over the next few weeks, Mikaela Shiffrin will slalom between rest and rehab. Usually so fast on a race course, the Olympic and world slalom champion is taking things at a much slower pace as she recov-

ers from a torn knee ligament and painful bone bruise. There's no timetable for her return to skiing, either. But there is some promising news: She won't need surgery. Just rest. Lots and lots of rest after tearing the medial collateral ligament in her right knee

during a wipeout while preparing for a giant slalom last Saturday in Are, Sweden. "I know lots of people are anxious to predict when I might return to skiing and then racing, but we just don't have any crystal balls," Shiffrin posted Tuesday on Instagram.

"I will work as hard as possible, take it week by week." Don't write off her return this season just yet. There's still a possibility the skier from Eagle-Vail, Colorado, returns to the slopes, maybe even for the World Cup Finals in March. Now that would be quite a birthday present for Shiffrin, who turns 21 on March 13. "Frankly, we have not talked about (a return) at all yet as it simply depends on how fast it'll heal and you never really know with a bone bruise how long that will take," Shiffrin's manager, Kilian Albrecht, told The Associated Press. "You can only take it week by week

first, and then day by day. "Obviously, there is hope that she can return as the season is still pretty long. But unfortunately all of the tech races are now, which is not good as she will for sure miss a lot of the races." Shiffrin was hurt when she crashed during a free skiing session on the competition hill. Albrecht said she basically flipped over and into the net. She flew back to Colorado for more tests on her knee. Shiffrin announced Tuesday on her social media sites: "Good news from physician visit yesterday — no additional injury from what we already knew." □

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# Triumphant Return for Cuban Baseball Defectors Puig, Abreu

Continued from Page 17

Pena, who is from Havana, was met by at least 20 family members, who laughed at stories of the catcher's life in America and handed him the phone to talk to relatives who hadn't been able to make it.

The players will hold two days of youth clinics while league and Major League Baseball Players Association executives talk business with their Cuban counterparts, including former President Fidel Castro's son Tony, one of the most powerful men in Cuban baseball.

League officials said they were optimistic about sealing a deal by early next year for the Tampa Bay Rays to play two spring training games in Cuba. They also hope to make progress in creating a legal route for Cuban players to make their way to the Major League.

"It's the goal of our commissioner and our owners to ultimately negotiate with the Cuban Baseball Federation and with the cooperation of the U.S. government and the Cuban government a safe and legal path for Cuban baseball players who desire to play Major League Baseball to reach the Major Leagues," Dan Halem, MLB's top lawyer, told a press conference covered by what appeared to be virtually every state newspaper, radio and television station in Cuba.

Cuban television avoids games featuring defectors but fans watch their idols' performances on pirated recordings distributed on computer USB drivers. A group of fans who gathered in the lobby of the Nacional waiting for the Cuban stars to pass by said the defectors' return to Cuba filled them with optimism about the future of the sport in Cuba.

"I see it as a big step forward in baseball in general," said Gustavo Fernandez, a 21-year-old sculptor. "I think we'll see better facilities here, players' contracts with other leagues, relations with Ma-

ior League Baseball."

U.S. teams played spring training games in Cuba before Castro's revolution but none appeared here from March 1959 until the Baltimore Orioles faced Cuba's national team in Havana in March 1999. MLB has not returned since.

Under Fidel Castro, a passionate baseball fan who saw sports as an expression of national glory, defectors were barred from returning. Most were banished from official memory, never mentioned on Cuban television even as they made headlines on U.S. sports pages.

Castro's brother and successor, President Raul Castro, has eased the treatment of players who leave as part of a broader easing of social controls. That included the 2013 removal of a required exit permit for all Cubans, except those considered essential to the country.

Some Major League players have been allowed back on low-key trips to see family. A few others, like star infielder Yoan Moncada, have received permission from Cuban authorities to depart legally to start careers in the United States. Moncada won a \$31.5 million signing bonus with the Boston Red Sox in March.

Players sneaked off Cuba's coast by smugglers in powerboats are a different matter. Their illegal departures have been treated until now as deep betrayals of the socialist system. Many have been banned from returning for eight years, like other Cubans who leave illegally.

Peter Bjarkman, author of the upcoming book "Cuba's Baseball Defectors: The Inside Story," said that he had counted 102 national-level players who had left Cuba this year, nearly a third of all those who have departed since 1980. It's part of a broader wave of Cuban emigration sparked by the fear that the U.S. will cancel special Cold War-era privileges for Cubans as part of the broader warming with the island. □



St. Louis Cardinals catcher Brayan Pena raises his arm to greet someone as he reunites with family members, including his grandmother Rosa de las Nives, 85, bottom left, at the Hotel Nacional in Havana, Cuba, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2015. Pena, who is from Havana, was met by at least 20 family members, who laughed at stories of the catcher's life in America and handed him the phone to talk to relatives who hadn't been able to make it.

(AP Photo/Desmond Boylan)

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**NBA Roundup:**

## Spurs rout Jazz 118-81 to improve to stellar 21-5 start

**SAN ANTONIO (AP)** — San Antonio built a giant 46-point lead thanks to its smothering defense before easing up to beat Utah 118-81 on Monday and extend its stellar start to the NBA season.

The Spurs improved to 21-5 — the second-best start in franchise history — and retained their 6-1/2 game lead in the Southwest Division.

In other key games, Atlantic Division leader Toronto had its four-game winning streak ended by Indiana, the Los Angeles Clippers defeated Detroit with a 3-pointer with 12 seconds remaining in overtime, and Miami took a share of the Southeast Division lead with a win over slumping Atlanta.

San Antonio has held 13 of its past 14 opponents under 100 points and the Spurs defense was again well on



Utah Jazz guard Alec Burks, right, is blocked by San Antonio Spurs forward Kyle Anderson, left, as he tries to shoot during the second half of an NBA basketball game, Monday, Dec. 14, 2015, in San Antonio. San Antonio won 118-81.

AP Photo/Eric Gay)

top of Utah, establishing a 20-point-plus lead at half-time for the third game in five.

Kawhi Leonard had 22 points while LaMarcus Aldridge and Tony Parker added 18 points each for the Spurs, who are 13-0 at home.

Derrick Favors led the Jazz with 16 points.

Indiana's Jordan Hill had season highs with 20 points and 13 rebounds as the Pacers beat Toronto 106-90.

Monta Ellis had 18 points for Indiana, which went on a 39-4 run in the first half to overturn a 21-point deficit. Kyle Lowry and DeMar DeRozan each scored 20 points for the Raptors, who had beaten the Pacers in their past five matches.

The Clippers edged Detroit 105-103 when Jamal Crawford hit a 3-pointer with 12.4 seconds left in overtime.

Blake Griffin made a pair of free throws with 38.8 seconds remaining to put the Clippers ahead 102-101 but Kentavious Caldwell-Pope tied it for the Pistons by going 1 for 2 from the foul line with 30.5 seconds left.

After Crawford's basket, the Clippers fouled Reggie Jackson with 9.3 seconds left. He made the first shot, missed the second, and teammate Andre Drummond got two chances for a tying tip-in, but missed both. Jackson missed a desperation shot at the buzzer.

Griffin finished with 34 points for the Clippers, and J.J. Redick had 24.

Jackson finished with 34 points and 11 rebounds for Detroit.

Miami led comfortably throughout in winning 100-88 at Atlanta.

Chris Bosh scored 24 points and Gerald Green had 20 for the Heat, who moved 1-1/2 games above their Southeast rival.

Kent Bazemore returned to Atlanta's starting lineup and scored a career-high 28 points.

Dallas' Chandler Parsons scored 15 of his 17 points in the second half to guide the Mavericks to a 104-94 win against Phoenix.

Parsons has been on restricted duty, coming off the bench lately, following offseason knee surgery. He had eight points during a 20-4 run to finish the third quarter, when Dallas made 13 of its last 14 shots to take a 77-58 lead. □

**NHL Roundup:**

## Capitals win 4-1 to spoil Sullivan's debut as coach

**The Associated Press**

**PITTSBURGH (AP)** — Washington won 4-1 at Pittsburgh on Monday to spoil Mike Sullivan's coaching debut for the Penguins.

Sullivan took over the position following the firing of Mike Johnston on Saturday, but saw his team lose heavily against a Capitals outfit led by two goals and an assist from T.J. Oshie.

Among other results, Ottawa beat Los Angeles on the back of a four-goal second period, and Buffalo won at Detroit for the first time in nine years.

Washington's Nicklas Backstrom had a goal and two assists while John Carlson also netted for the Capitals, who moved 11 points above their Metropolitan Division rival. Evgeni Malkin scored his team-leading 14th goal for the Penguins. Ottawa's Mike Hoffman had two goals and an assist to lead the Senators over Los Angeles 5-3.

Kyle Turris, Erik Karlsson and Mika Zibanejad also scored

for the Senators. Jamie McBain, Tyler Toffoli and Jake Muzzin netted for Los Angeles, who missed a chance to build on their 10-point lead in the Pacific Division.

Buffalo's Ryan O'Reilly and Johan Larsson scored 61 seconds apart late in the third period to give the Sabres a rare win at Detroit, beating the Red Wings 2-1. O'Reilly tied it 1-1 at 15:46 when his deflected shot beat goalie Petr Mrazek between the legs. Larsson

scored the go-ahead goal with 3:13 remaining; his first goal in 30 games.

Brad Richards scored for the Red Wings, whose run of games earning at least a point ended at 13.

Edmonton's Andrej Sekera scored 41 seconds into overtime to lift the Oilers over Boston 3-2 for their sixth straight victory.

Tampa Bay's Brian Boyle scored a short-handed goal in the third period to help the Lightning beat Columbus 2-1. □



## SHORT PUTTS

### Rory McIlroy wins the EU Tour player award for 3rd time

**VIRGINIA WATER, England (AP)** — Rory McIlroy has been voted the European Tour's player of the year for 2015, winning the award for the third time in the past four seasons. The 26-year-old Northern Irishman successfully defended the Race to Dubai title after winning the season-ending World Tour Championship in Dubai last month. He had two other victories, at the Dubai Desert Classic and the WGC-Cadillac Match Play. McIlroy says he feels "very proud to have won this prestigious award for the third time." He says it is "always special, no matter how often, to be recognized this way." □

### Thongchai, Lahiri on Singh's team to at the EurAsia Cup

**KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP)** — Jeev Milkha Singh has included China's Wu Ashun as one of his captain's picks to join Thongchai Jaidee and Anirban Lahiri in the Asia team for the EurAsia Cup next month. Lahiri and Thongchai were among the automatic qualifiers from the Asian Tour, while Kiradech Aphibarnrat, Shingo Katayama, K.T. Kim and Byeonghun An made the team based on world golf rankings. □

## NBA referee Kennedy tells Yahoo he is gay after slur

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Veteran NBA referee Bill Kennedy has told Yahoo Sports he is gay, nearly two weeks after Sacramento Kings guard Rajon Rondo directed a gay slur at him during a game.

Kennedy said he is "proud to be an NBA referee and I am proud to be a gay man," adding that he chose to come out in hopes of sending a message "that you must allow no one to make you feel ashamed of who you are." Rondo was suspended one game by the NBA for directing a derogatory and offensive term toward a referee in the Kings' game against Boston in Mexico on Dec. 3. Rondo apologized Monday and the Kings said his comments were disrespectful and offensive.

Kennedy is in his 18th season as an NBA official, having worked more than 1,050 regular-season games and five in the NBA Finals.

"I wholeheartedly support Bill's decision to live his life proudly and openly," NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said in a statement. "Throughout his 18-year career with the league, Bill has excelled as a referee because of his passion, dedication and courage. Those qualities will continue to serve him well both as a game official and as a positive influence for others. While our league has made great progress, our

work continues to ensure that everyone is treated with respect and dignity." Kennedy worked San Anto-

nobody's business. It just shows ignorance to act in a derogatory way toward anybody in the LGBT com-

on sexual orientation or anything else," Kings general manager Vlade Divac said. "Rajon has apolo-



**NBA referee Bill Kennedy, left, during the second half of an NBA basketball game between the San Antonio Spurs and Utah Jazz, Monday, Dec. 14, 2015, in San Antonio. Kennedy has told Yahoo Sports he is gay after Sacramento Kings guard Rajon Rondo directed a gay slur at him during a game.** (AP Photo/Eric Gay)

nio's home game against Utah on Monday, receiving applause from fans when he was shown on the videoboard with the officiating crew and his name was announced.

Spurs coach Gregg Popovich criticized Rondo's comments before San Antonio's 118-81 victory.

"It's unfortunate," Popovich said. "It's disgusting, because Billy, he is a great guy. He's been a class act on and off the court. And as far as anyone's sexual orientation, it's just

munity. It just doesn't make sense." The league took more than a week before announcing a penalty for Rondo, who will sit out Sacramento's game against Houston on Tuesday. Yahoo reported that Kennedy and another referee told league investigators that Rondo used profanity and anti-gay comments.

"Rajon's comment was disrespectful and offensive, and we wholeheartedly disapprove of any language that discriminates or disparages others based

gized and this is not the sort of behavior we condone nor is it representative of the Sacramento Kings organization."

Owner Vivek Ranadive also apologized to Kennedy.

Rondo wrote on Twitter that his actions during the game "were out of frustration and emotion, period!"

"They absolutely do not reflect my feelings toward the LGBT community," Rondo added. "I did not mean to offend or disrespect anyone." □

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# Holiday Feast

Traditionally, a festive feast or dinner is a focal element of the holiday season where we sit down with family and friends for the "breaking of the bread". The expression "breaking of bread", some believe, must be qualified. "Breaking of bread" signified the dividing of the bread cakes or loaves, which were used by Orientals. Sometimes "breaking of bread" is used concerning partaking of a common meal (Mk. 6: 41; Acts 27: 35) and "Breaking of bread" is also used in connection with the religious memorial called the Lord's Supper. We are talking about Christmas dinner and before we can sit down to enjoy our meal, we need to plan our menu.

For several years already we have said goodbye to the traditional holiday smoked ham. Ham, as all

pork products is detrimental to people in all blood groups. Pork aggravates blood to become sticky; slows down proper digestion and obstructs absorption of nutrition. Instead we have a turkey that I slowly roast on the barbeque. No deep-frying here! Turkey has become my family dinner's centerpiece because it is a healthy alternative to more traditional foods that are classed as being detrimental according to your blood type. I carve a mean plate of turkey in front of our guests. You might not know this but the nutrition facts of turkey per serving is: 232 calories, 11 grams of fat, but only 3 grams saturated fat, 108 mg cholesterol, 77 mg sodium, 0 g carbohydrate, 0 g fiber, 32 grams protein, and 15% iron. There is nothing wrong nutritionally here.

Additionally, hiding in the 32 grams of protein is tryptophan an essential amino acid. Tryptophan is needed for the production of Niacin (vitamin B 3) and is the precursor of our brain chemical serotonin. Serotonin is the calming, sedating substance essential for normal mood and sleep patterns. Now you know why you are so inclined to take a nap after a turkey dinner.

The traditional potato smothered in cheese is out. Both the potato and cheese will slow down the metabolism of most of us. Instead, for carbohydrates we use sweet potatoes, pumpkin, and brown rice. This year, after baking the potatoes in the grill next to the turkey, we are going to mash the sweet potatoes with a touch of ginger. Ginger contains components that positively influence known disease

susceptibility, a good thing. I think the ginger balances nicely the taste of the sweet potatoes. Slow, baking brings out the sweetness in the potatoes, but the glycemic load is very low! This means it won't spike your insulin. The nutrition facts per serving of sweet potatoes includes: 240 calories, 6 g total fat, 4 g saturated fat, 15 mg cholesterol, 73 mg sodium, 46 g carbohydrate, 5 g fiber, 2 g protein, 294% vitamin A, 54% vitamin C. Did you see the amount of vitamin A? Wow, I am surprised that sweet potatoes do not need to be registered as an eye medicine.

We could not think about any holiday dinner without serving pumpkin. Here we go again helping our eyes. The nutrition facts for pumpkin per serving is: 286 calories, 13 grams total fat, 4 g saturated fat, 86 mg cholesterol, 120 mg sodium, 38 g carbohydrate, 2 grams of fiber, 7 grams protein, 130% vitamin A, 9% vitamin C, 7% calcium, 13% iron. Did you notice the blood building qualities of pumpkin? Only people with blood group B cannot enjoy this delicious and nutritious vegetable. In Aruba, pumpkin soup is a specialty. If I am lucky Amy might bake me a pumpkin pie, yum! Or maybe we will make pumpkin with onions.

As in every meal at our house brown rice is the staple carbohydrate. For this meaningful occasion we will add some zest (and even more nutrition) to our brown rice with wild rice and quinoa. Brown rice can be enjoyed by all blood groups. White "polished" rice is nutritionally lifeless since the bran, which contains all of the nutrition, has been stolen to sell to pharmaceutical companies to make B complex vitamins. This should give us a strong

indication the benefit derived from eating brown rice. The wild rice, especially if harvested from wild ponds, contains trace minerals missing in our other grains. Super-grain, Peruvian quinoa has one of the highest amounts of absorbable calcium available. Support for our bones that cooks in just 15 minutes!

And what would turkey dinner be without cranberry sauce? This year, "can the can" full of dangerously unhealthy, high fructose corn syrup. Homemade cranberry sauce takes only 15 minutes on the stove, make with low processed cane sugar or natural grape sugar. Try arrowroot instead of cornstarch for thickener in the smooth variety or make chunky. Cranberries are a traditional remedy for bladder infection. Cranberries contain a naturally occurring simple sugar, closely related to glucose called D- mannose. D-Mannose is metabolized by our bodies and excreted into the urine. This simple sugar helps maintain a healthy urinary tract by its interaction with the bacterium found in over 90% of all bladder infections, Escherichia coli ("E. coli"). This strain of E.coli is found as part of the "normal microflora" in every intestinal tract. But even normal E.coli does not belong in the bladder and urinary tract. In these areas they multiply and become an infection. D-Mannose "sticks" to E.coli. When we take a large quantity of D-Mannose by eating cranberries, almost all of it spills into the urine through our kidneys, literally "coating" any E.coli present so they can no longer "stick" to the inside walls of the bladder and urinary tract. The E.coli is literally rinsed away with normal urination! Imagine, all from eating cranberries. Include your favorite fresh

green vegetables prepared with olive oil and fresh herbs, and you've got yourself a healthy, holiday feast.

Choosing your Holiday Menu? Get the Point! Selecting healthy foods from your "beneficial" list (available at our Clinic) is a delicious and healthy alternative to some traditional holiday foods. As for our "Breaking of bread" dinner being a "common meal" or a "religious memorial", I do not make a distinction. Come to clinic so we can teach you how to make eating healthy an everyday event. Meanwhile, with my glass of red wine, loaded with antioxidants, I will toast and give thanks for the presence of healthy family members and friends and remember those of you who cannot make it this year. GIVE THE GIFT OF HEALTH: Gift Certificates and Organic Products available at Viana Center.

CARLOS VIANA, Ph. D. is an Oriental Medical Doctor (O.M.D.) having studied in China; a US Board Cert. Clinical Nutritionist (C.C.N.), an Addiction Professional (C.Ad.), Chairperson of the Latin American Committee of the International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology (IAOMT), a Rejuvenating Cell Therapist specializing in Age Management, has a weekly radio program, writes and lectures extensively. For information: VIANA HEALING CENTER, Kibaima 7, St Cruz TEL: 585-1270 Web Site: [www.vianaheal.com](http://www.vianaheal.com)

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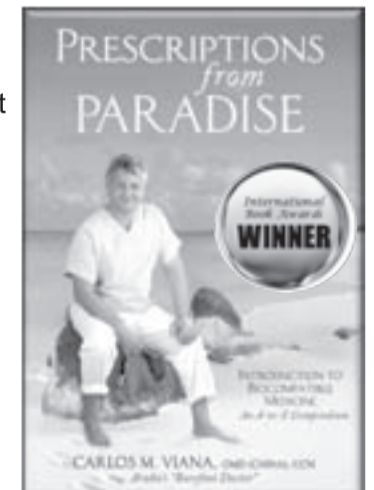


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### TECH NOTES

#### British officials make arrest in VTech hacking

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Police in the UK say they've made an arrest in the hacking of kids' technology maker VTech, which compromised the personal information of more than 6 million children around the world.

The South East Regional Organised Crime Unit, a regional task force made up of a handful of English police departments, says a 21-year-old man was arrested on hacking-related charges Tuesday morning in Bracknell, a town about 30 miles west of London. Police seized a number of electronic items that will be examined by a cyber-crime forensics unit. The hacking of Hong Kong-based VTech Holdings Ltd. compromised the profiles of 6.4 million kids around the world, along with the 4.9 million parent accounts that they were connected to.

#### Firms vow hate speech deleted within 24 hours

**BERLIN (AP)** — Facebook, Google and Twitter have agreed to delete hate speech deemed illegal in Germany within 24 hours. The move follows pressure from German authorities concerned about the increasing volume of racist abuse being posted on social networking sites. In a joint statement Tuesday, the Justice Ministry and the three companies said that it will become easier for users and anti-racism groups to flag hate speech. □

### Tech Review:

## Dueling digital assistants Siri, Cortana and 'OK Google'

BRANDON BAILEY

AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) —

Cortana's learning the neighborhood. Google's digital assistant can't tell a joke. And Siri apparently has a thing for the metric system.

Those are just a few of the things I learned after staging a face-off for the three leading digital assistants. Apple's Siri and "OK Google" — they're not big on personification at Google — are now standard on smartphones; Microsoft recently added its Cortana service to Windows 10, so it works on PCs, too.

Now that just about anyone can talk to their phone or computer, we wanted to see what happens when you try.

Unsurprisingly, none of the assistants is perfect. Surprisingly, they do have distinct personalities, even if they're just deliberate artifacts of their creators.

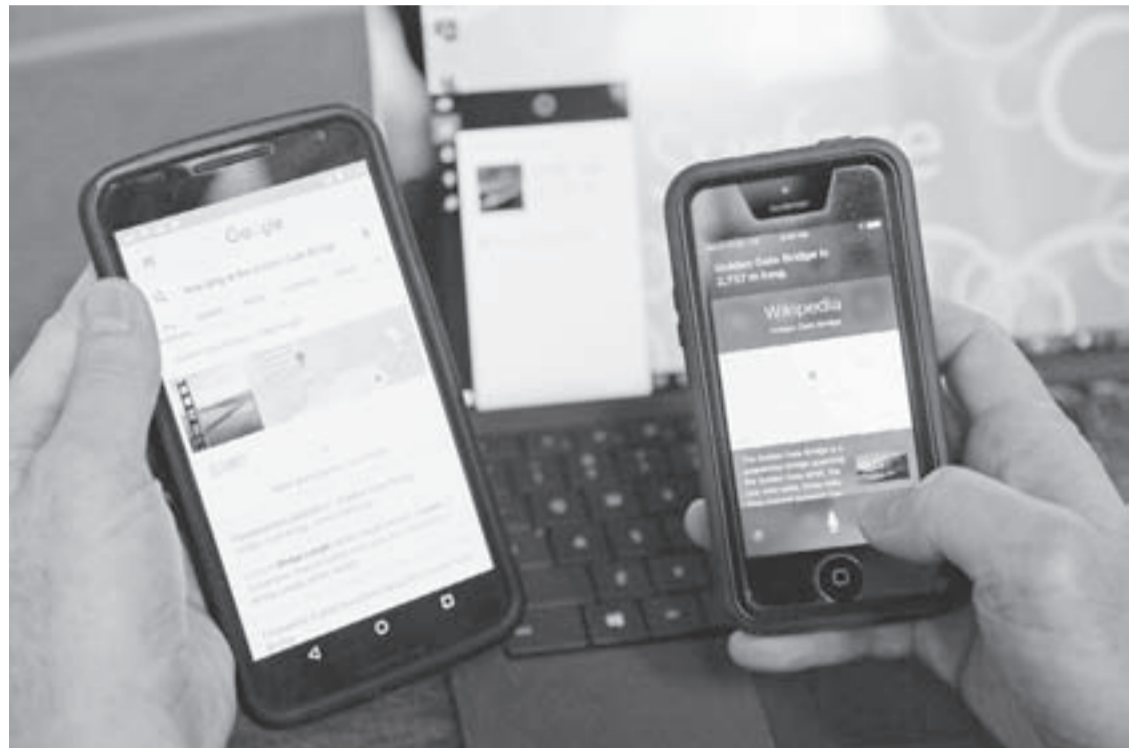
I asked the same 10 questions of each service, using an iPhone with Siri, a Nexus phone with Android's "OK Google" and a Microsoft Surface Pro tablet with Cortana.

#### INFORMATION PLEASE

First up: Some basic factual questions. All three did pretty well when asked, "What's it like outside?"

Cortana earned extra points for answering with a spoken weather report. Google and Siri each showed a screen image that listed current conditions and a forecast.

All three supplied President Obama's age. When asked "What's his wife's name?" they all remembered that the question referred to the president, and correctly identified the First



Associated Press technology writer Brandon Bailey uses the Google, Cortana and Siri digital assistants to learn the length of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco while staging a face-off between the three leading digital assistants.

(AP Photo/Eric Risberg)

Lady: Michelle Obama. Similarly, they all knew the length of the Golden Gate Bridge. But for some reason, Siri answered in meters, while Cortana and Google stuck to feet.

#### AT YOUR SERVICE

Next came more complicated tasks, like finding the nearest pharmacy. Google and Siri listed three within a half-mile (800 meters) of The Associated Press bureau in downtown San Francisco. But neither mentioned the drug store on the ground floor of the building where the bureau is located. Cortana did.

Ever feel like ducking work to catch an afternoon movie? (Shhh! Don't tell my editor.) All three assistants had local movie listings at their digital fingertips. But Siri led off with a new release at a theater just half a mile from the AP bureau. With a couple of taps, Siri had opened Fandango, an app that lets you buy

tickets online.

Google also connected with Fandango. Cortana had more trouble; Microsoft lags behind Apple and Google in the number of apps that work with its software, and I couldn't get the right Fandango app to load on a Surface tablet.

#### JUST FOR LAUGHS

Finally, a personality test. I challenged each to tell a joke. Siri had the best answer: "If I told you a joke in my language, I'd have to explain it."

Then I tried the famous line from "2001: A Space Odyssey" in which astronaut Dave Bowman tells the ship's computer: "Open the pod bay doors." Cortana knows the right answer: "I'm sorry Dave. I'm afraid I can't do that." But Siri had a better one: "Doesn't anybody knock anymore?" To be clear, these aren't the witty rejoinders of some artificial intelligence. The creators of Siri and Cortana

thought it would be fun to pre-load each service with humorous answers to predictable questions.

Google doesn't bother with such frills. Sticking to its search-engine roots, "OK Google" answered the "2001" question by silently presenting a series of Internet links, starting with one for a YouTube clip from the movie.

Likewise, when asked about the meaning of life, Siri and Cortana were both ready with a quip. Google just recited a dry definition that only a biologist could love: "Life is the condition that distinguishes animals and plants from inorganic matter. ..."

#### FINAL SCORE

All three services are good on factual questions. Siri's programmers have the best sense of humor. Google stays focused on the task at hand. And Cortana is quickly catching up to both of them. □

## Wall Street posts biggest gain in a week

**MARLEY JAY**  
AP Markets Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Stocks posted their biggest gains in more than a week Tuesday, led by rising energy companies and banks.

The market was higher all day, building on a late gain the day before. The Standard & Poor's 500 index rose for the second day in a row, something that hadn't happened since early November. Energy stocks rose as the price of crude oil jumped 3 percent, and banks moved higher a day ahead of an expected rate increase by the Federal Reserve.

The Dow Jones industrial average added 156.41 points, or 0.9 percent, to 17,524.91. The S&P 500 increased 21.47 points, or 1.1 percent, to 2,043.41. The Nasdaq composite index gained 43.13 points, or 0.9 percent, to 4,995.36.

Stocks have been on a bumpy ride ever since a six-week winning streak ended in early Novem-

ber. They dropped sharply in mid-November, then bounced back the following week, but failed to build consistently on those gains.

on the economy, many expect the Fed to begin returning borrowing costs back toward normal levels with its first interest rate increase in nine years. The government said early Tuesday that prices for a variety of goods and services rose last month, including plane tickets and medical care. Overall prices were unchanged from last year because food and energy prices are weak, but "core inflation," which leaves out energy and food, rose 0.2 percent. That's the best result in more than a year. Michelle Girard, chief U.S. economist for RBS, said the reassuring signal on inflation should remove any last barriers to the Fed to raise rates. The inflation report gave the Fed "a green light to take action tomorrow," Girard said. The Fed's key short-term interest rate has been near zero for seven years. Energy stocks were the top-performing sector as U.S. crude rose \$1.04, or 2.9

percent, to \$37.35 a barrel in New York. That's on top of a 2 percent gain on Monday. Oil is still down 30 percent in 2015 and is at its lowest in more than six years. Brent crude, a benchmark for international oils, rose 53 cents, or 1.4 percent, to \$38.45 a barrel in London.

That helped the energy sector, which has struggled throughout 2015. Ex-

on Mobil had its best day since late August. Its shares jumped \$3.40, or 4.5 percent, to \$79.43. Offshore drillers Ensco added \$1.21, or 8 percent, to \$16.40 and Transocean rose 74 cents, or 5.9 percent, to \$13.38.

Natural gas continued to tumble. Its price slid 7.2 cents, or 3.8 percent, to \$1.822 per 1,000 cubic feet. That's the lowest price since March 1999, not adjusting for inflation. Industrial demand for natural gas has been weak, and the warm weather means most Americans haven't needed as much heat for their homes as they usually do this time of year.

In other energy trading, wholesale gasoline fell 1.1 cents, or 0.9 percent, to \$1.2444 a gallon and heating oil rose 1.9 cents, or 1.7 percent, to \$1.147 a gallon. Bank stocks climbed as investors anticipated that higher interest rates would help banks become more profitable by charging more for loans. JPMorgan



This photo shows the head office and logo of Valeant Pharmaceuticals in Montreal. Valeant Pharmaceuticals has a new distribution deal with Walgreens.

(Ryan Remiorz/The Canadian Press/AP)

## Valeant in new distribution deal with Walgreens group

**TOM MURPHY**  
AP Business Writer

Valeant Pharmaceuticals has a new distribution deal with Walgreens, sending shares of the beleaguered Canadian drug company up sharply in morning trading. The company said Tuesday that the agreement will help to lower the prices of its branded prescription-based dermatological and ophthalmological products by 10 percent. The reduced pricing will apply to the wholesale list prices of the products and be phased in over the next six to nine months. The deal also covers over-the-counter products made by Valeant Pharmaceuticals International Inc. The deal will allow consumers to get Valeant's dermatology and ophthalmology products — including Luzu and Zylet — at a lower out-of-pocket cost from more than 8,000 Walgreens U.S. retail pharmacy locations and participating independent retailers. Walgreens is the nation's largest drug-store chain. The 20-year deal takes effect early next year. Patient advocates, doctors and Congressional leaders have attacked Valeant and other drug companies like Turing Pharmaceuticals for aggressively increasing prices on some prescription drugs. Critics say the companies have exploited a system lacking in competition to hike prices for critically needed medicines. Valeant, in particular, has taken criticism for its practice of buying smaller drug developers, hiking drug prices and

then slashing spending on research into new drugs.

The Laval, Quebec, company drew the attention of Congress following its purchase of the life-saving heart drugs Nitropress and Isuprel. The company jacked up prices on both drugs shortly after buying them from Marathon Pharmaceuticals in February, tripling one and raising the other sixfold. Those drugs were not mentioned in Tuesday's announcement regarding price reductions, but the companies said they hope to expand their agreement "over time" to include other therapeutic areas. In October, Valeant cut ties with the mail-order pharmacy Philidor, saying that it had lost confidence in the company's operations. That followed accusations from the short seller researcher firm Citron that Valeant used Philidor to create a network of "phantom pharmacies" to steer pharmacy benefit managers toward Valeant's more expensive drugs, instead of lower-priced alternatives.

Valeant had previously disclosed that it had purchased an option to buy Philidor, which it used to help deliver drugs more quickly to patients through the mail.

Federal prosecutors have subpoenaed documents tied to Valeant's drug pricing and other practices ahead of a presidential election in which the soaring price of prescription medicines has become a top political issue and the chief health concern of many Americans. □



Traders Michael Milano, left, and Michael Mozian work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2015. Stocks posted their biggest gains in more than a week Tuesday, led by rising energy companies and banks. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

ber. They dropped sharply in mid-November, then bounced back the following week, but failed to build consistently on those gains.

Last week, a plunge in the price of oil set off a sharp drop in energy stocks, which dragged the broader market down to its second-worst weekly performance of 2015. Now with more encouraging signs

percent, to \$37.35 a barrel in New York. That's on top of a 2 percent gain on Monday. Oil is still down 30 percent in 2015 and is at its lowest in more than six years. Brent crude, a benchmark for international oils, rose 53 cents, or 1.4 percent, to \$38.45 a barrel in London.

That helped the energy sector, which has struggled throughout 2015. Ex-

Chase rose \$1.83, or 2.8 percent, to \$66.10 and Wells Fargo gained \$1.71, or 3.2 percent, to \$54.91. Investors dipped a toe back into the high-yield bond market after several days of selling. The iShares high yield corporate bond ETF rose \$1.29, or 1.6 percent, to \$80.12 and the SPDR Barclays high yield bond ETF rose 39 cents, or 1.2 percent, to \$33.81. □



# Yahoo facing more pressure from frustrated shareholders



Yahoo President and CEO Marissa Mayer speaks in Las Vegas. Yahoo is facing shareholder pressure to pursue other alternatives besides a complex spinoff of its Internet operations while Mayer struggles to revive the company's revenue growth.

(AP Photo/Julie Jacobson)

**MICHAEL LIEDTKE**

**AP Technology Writer SAN FRANCISCO (AP)**—Yahoo is facing shareholder pressure to pursue other alternatives besides a complex spinoff of its Internet operations while CEO Marissa Mayer struggles to revive the company's revenue growth.

The demands from SpringOwl Asset Management and Canyon Capital Advisors reflect shareholders' frustration with Mayer's inability to snap the company out of a financial funk after three-and-half years on the job.

Mayer hoped to placate investors with last week's announcement of a revised spinoff, but the company's stock has slid 6 percent since then. The shares fell 32 cents to close Monday at \$32.59.

SpringOwl, a New York hedge fund, has sent a 99-page presentation to Yahoo's board that calls for the company to lay off 9,000 of its 10,700 workers and eliminate free food for employees to help save \$2

billion annually. Canyon Capital, a Los Angeles investment firm, wants Yahoo to sell its Internet business instead of spinning it off.

Yahoo has warned the spinoff could take more than a year to complete, a time frame that Canyon Capital called "simply unacceptable" after Yahoo spent

most of this year preparing to break off its \$31 billion stake in China's Alibaba Group in an attempt to avoid paying taxes on the gains from its initial investment of \$1 billion.

Yahoo scrapped the Alibaba spinoff after another shareholder, Starboard Value, threatened an attempt to overthrow the board if

the company stuck to that plan. Starboard and other investors were worried the Alibaba stake would be taxed at a cost of more than \$10 billion after the Internal Revenue Service declined to guarantee it would qualify for an exemption.

Yahoo Inc. didn't immediately respond to requests for comment about the critiques from SpringOwl and Canyon Capital.

Now that two more shareholders expressing their dismay with Yahoo's direction, Mayer's fate could be tied to a cost-cutting reorganization that she has been working on for the past two months. Mayer, who is on a brief maternity leave af-

ter giving birth to twins last week, says the overhaul will jettison Yahoo's least profitable products — a shake-up that could lay off a large number of workers. The details of the reorganization are supposed to be announced next month when the Sunnyvale, California, company releases its fourth-quarter earnings. In its Dec. 11 letter to Yahoo's board, Canyon Capital indicated that Mayer already has been given too much time to turn things around.

"We do not understand the board's continued support of the company's senior management team, given its track record," Canyon Capital wrote. □

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## UK astronaut Tim Peake puts space back on agenda in Britain



British astronaut Tim Peake, left, Russian cosmonaut Yuri Malenchenko, center, and U.S. astronaut Tim Kopra, members of the main crew of the expedition to the International Space Station (ISS), walk to report to members of the State Committee prior to the launch of Soyuz TMA-19M space ship at the Russian leased Baikonur cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2015.

(AP Photo/Dmitry Lovetsky, Pool)

**JILL LAWLESS**  
**Associated Press**

**LONDON (AP)** — Britain has decided to boldly go where others have gone before.

More than half a century after Yuri Gagarin became the first human in orbit, the U.K. is experiencing a surge of space mania thanks to its first official astronaut — a soft-spoken pilot named Tim who will spend some of his six-month stint on the International Space Station attempting to brew a decent cup of tea in zero gravity.

Millions around the country paused in front of TVs and computer screens Tuesday to watch a Russian Soyuz spacecraft carrying Maj. Tim Peake and two other astronauts — Timothy Kopra of the United States and Yuri Malenchenko of Russia — blast off from Kazakhstan's Baikonur Cosmodrome. The Soyuz spacecraft moored smoothly at 8:33 p.m. Moscow time (1733 GMT) at the International Space Station

Tuesday about 6 ½ hours after lifting off from Baikonur launch pad in Kazakhstan. Peake, a 43-year-old former army helicopter pilot, is not the first Briton in space.

Helen Sharman visited Russia's Mir space station in 1991 on a privately backed mission and several British-born American citizens flew with NASA's space shuttle

program.

But Peake is Britain's first publicly funded British astronaut and the first Briton to visit the International Space Station. The spacecraft docked successfully at the space station roughly six hours after liftoff.

For decades, cost-conscious British governments declined to invest in human space flight, confining the U.K.'s space contribution to robotic missions.

"The U.K. has taken an understandably hard economic view of human space flight over the years and asked itself what it might be worth," said Kevin Fong, an expert in space medicine who will explore how to survive in space in this year's Royal Institution Christmas science lectures. "The answer to that question is quite a lot, actually." He said Peake's voyage "has already inspired schoolchildren, and will go on to do so. But there's a wider importance in show-

ing that Britain is not done exploring yet."

The government has been raising Britain's space aspirations for several years. In 2010 it set up the U.K. Space Agency, which has a relatively modest budget of about 320 million pounds (\$485 million) a year.

This week the Conservative government announced Britain's first National Space Policy, which aims to capture 10 percent of the global space industry and create 100,000 high-tech jobs — though it's unclear how these goals will be funded. Peake's voyage has helped millions of Britons rediscover an excited interest in outer space.

One British reporter at a pre-launch press conference told Peake that "you will be taking the pride and excitement of everybody back home, so much so that you probably won't need any fuel to get into orbit."

As Peake psyched himself for liftoff Tuesday by listening to tracks by Queen, U2 and Coldplay, the BBC offered wall-to-wall TV coverage, complete with good-luck messages from Sting, Prime Minister David Cameron and "Doctor Who" star Peter Capaldi. At London's Science Museum, hundreds of students cheered wildly as the rocket lifted off.

And in a distinctly British contribution to science, he will try out a new tea-making process that lets him remove the teabag from the drink pouches used in zero gravity.

"That way," Peake told students during a question-and-answer session last month, "I can spend as long as I like drinking my tea and it won't get stewed, and hopefully it won't get cold either." □



The Soyuz-FG rocket booster with Soyuz TMA-19M space ship carrying a new crew to the International Space Station, ISS, blasts off at the Russian leased Baikonur cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2015.

(AP Photo/Dmitry Lovetsky)

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## 'Force Awakens' carpet includes Stormtroopers, droids, stars

**DERRIK J. LANG**  
AP Entertainment Writer

**LOS ANGELES (AP)** — The next generation of "Star Wars" films kicked off with an elaborate debut for

score played in a massive opaque tent that built on years of secrecy surrounding the film, which some expect to break box office records when it is released

of "The Force Awakens" for the past three years, director J.J. Abrams seemed overwhelmed by the magnitude of the premiere. "It's very surreal. I've nev-

see the characters Luke Skywalker, Leia Organa and Han Solo reunite for

the first time on the big screen since 1983's "Return of the Jedi." □



Fans cheer in the stands at world premiere of "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" at the TCL Chinese Theatre on Monday, Dec. 14, 2015, in Los Angeles.

(Photo by Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP)

"The Force Awakens" this week that served as a proverbial passing of the lightsaber to new groups of fighters dueling in a cinematic galaxy far, far away. "The Force Awakens" premiere had familiar elements for a "Star Wars" event: Stormtroopers marched and droids rolled down the red carpet. Later, Carrie Fisher joked for cameras and Harrison Ford and Lupita Nyong'o reflected on the next phase of the franchise.

The world's first screening of the seventh "Star Wars" film attracted a constellation of stars, including Spike Lee, Jon Favreau, Janelle Monae, Elizabeth Banks and Sofia Vergara. While many opted for chic red carpet attire, Joseph Gordon-Levitt showed up dressed as Jedi master Yoda.

John Williams' soaring

on Friday. At one point, Fisher turned the microphone on her co-star, Oscar Isaac, and conducted an interview that included her dropping an expletive. Ford reflected on the impact of the film and the role that catapulted him to superstardom.

"Well, in the '70s nobody knew what to anticipate," Ford said in an interview with Starwars.com. "Nobody had ever seen anything like it. Now we have to live up to what the first films delivered."

Before the film's human stars arrived, the droid BB-8 rolled by the cameras. The soccerball-esque droid has been a popular fixture in trailers for the seventh "Star Wars" film, and it was soon joined by series mainstays C-3PO and R2-D2. Despite being in charge

er seen this kind of thing," he told Starwars.com. "It's insane. I feel enormously guilty for this community, this neighborhood."

The carpet melded classic "Star Wars" figures with the new generation that will carry the weight of two more sequels, video games, comic books, toys and other merchandise.

Abrams and Lucas posed together for photos, and both men took time to chat with fans before heading into the premiere. Original trilogy cast members Mark Hamill and Billy Dee Williams attended, as did series newcomers Max von Sydow, Gwendolyn Christie, John Boyega and Daisy Ridley.

Disney took over a half-mile section of Hollywood Boulevard for the premiere, where the film was screening at three theaters. Some 5,000 invited guests would

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SAT 2:30 | 4:50 | 7:10 | 9:30 | 11:50  
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# At last, lovemaking for Sheldon, Amy on 'Big Bang Theory'

**LYNN ELBER**

**AP Television Writer**

**BURBANK, Calif. (AP)** — In the same week, "Star Wars" returns and scientists-in-love Sheldon and Amy finally consummate their relationship on "The Big Bang Theory." Could even the geekiest fan ask for more? On Thursday's episode (8 p.m. EDT, CBS), Jim Parsons' Sheldon and Mayim Bialik's Amy have sex for the first time, with each other or anyone else, more than six TV seasons after meeting through an online dating site.

But let the stars of the top-rated comedy tell you about it.

"Amy's been eager all along for a different kind of connection, but it's actually initiated by Sheldon," Bialik said.

"Sheldon's eager for her to know she's special to him, and this is one of the items on the list that he feels could show that," Parsons

said.

So romantic! And how explicit is the scene?

Bialik: "More than we

nally happened."

Parsons (dismissively): "Oh, no!"

Bialik: "There's a before and



This photo shows, Jim Parsons, right, as Sheldon and Mayim Bialik, left, as Amy, in a scene from the television series, "The Big Bang Theory."

(Monty Brinton/CBS via AP)

thought. We're in bed."

Parsons: "Well, of course we are. We aren't going into the back of a car."

Bialik: "I thought we would just talk about it when it fi-

there's an after. There's no during."

"Star Wars: The Force Awakens," out Friday in the real world, is used as a comic device throughout the epi-

sode and even threatens to derail the couple's coupling.

After deciding to give Amy the gift of sex on her birthday, Sheldon realizes there's a conflict with his opening-day movie ticket. He gets sage advice from the late Professor Proton, his childhood hero resurrected in ghostly form as a figment of Sheldon's subconscious. The great Bob Newhart returns as the professor, grandly decked out in Obi-Wan Kenobi robes.

"It's hard for him (Sheldon) to understand that Amy won't accept the fact that this is the premiere of 'Star Wars,' so I have to present that side," Newhart said.

His delivery is as droll and his timing as impeccable as ever, Newhart milks the scene for all it's worth.

"Can I get out of this muumu now?" Proton asks after counseling Sheldon.

"Those are the robes of the Jedi, the guardians of

peace and justice in the galaxy," Sheldon replies.

"And they don't wear underwear," the professor complains.

Parsons and Bialik also make the most of the smartly — and sweetly — written episode, stumbling toward intimacy with tender regard for each other. Series executive producer and co-creator Chuck Lorre, a master of network TV comedy whose credits include "Two and a Half Men," "Mike & Molly" and "Mom," had a look of eager anticipation when he arrived for the episode's taping last month at a Warner Bros. soundstage.

"It's exciting to see how far these characters have grown," Lorre said afterward. "We would never have anticipated that they would have progressed to the point where they're having real, in-depth relationships." □

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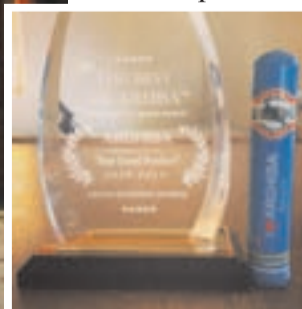


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## Howard Stern announces 5-year deal with Sirius XM

DAVID BAUDER

AP Entertainment Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Howard Stern has signed a third five-year deal to keep his radio show at SiriusXM and will be expanding into video, allowing fans to see him do the show and have access to 30 years of his career highlights. Once radio's ultimate shock jock, Stern at 61 has grown mellow

and his show's signature is becoming its in-depth interviews with celebrities like Bill Murray, Gwyneth Paltrow, Neil Young, Bradley Cooper, Madonna, Chris Rock and others. Terms were not disclosed, but since it includes a 12-year provision giving the company control of Stern's library, it is likely well north of the \$500 million deal Stern

signed when he moved to satellite radio in 2006. Sirius is the house Stern built: a money-losing venture with 600,000 subscribers when he signed, it merged with competitor XM in 2008 and now has 29 million subscribers and annual revenue of \$4.5 billion, with more than \$1 billion in profits. Stern, on his show Tuesday, described the deal as a move

into the future. "You'll be able to get everything you want in audio and video — and then some," he said, as the music to "Star Trek" played in the background. More specific plans for Stern's video will be announced later. Stern works on his own channel Monday through Thursday from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m., although some weeks he works three

days. He has two satellite channels on Sirius. Stern increased his public profile as a judge on NBC's summertime show, "America's Got Talent," but said in June that he was stopping that. Shares of SiriusXM Holdings Inc. rose 12 cents, or 3 percent, to \$4.12 in morning trading. They are up almost 18 percent so far this year. □

## Sting regales Carnegie Hall crowd with old favorites

JOCELYN NOVECK

AP National Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — They say it's practice, practice, practice that gets you to Carnegie Hall. But for Sting, it was a chance encounter with Britain's Queen Mother when he was 10 years old that gave him the ambition and drive he needed to reach that hallowed stage.

The rocker told the story of that fateful encounter Monday night during an ebullient show — at once intimate and grand — that marked his first solo headline gig at the venerable New York venue, despite his having performed many times there. He was accompanied by the powerful Orchestra of St. Luke's, with many of his old classics arranged by conductor Rob Mathes.

The 64-year-old singer arrived to a standing ovation, and immediately began with "Englishman in New York," aptly enough, with the crowd singing along to the lyric, "Be yourself no matter what they say."

"I sincerely hope that THIS Englishman in New York has earned a place here," he said, to cheers.

He performed many of his hits from his Police years and then from his solo career, and included a couple songs from his recent Broadway show, "The Last Ship." He also paid tribute to Frank Sinatra in his centennial year, performing "In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning" along with trumpeter Chris Botti. He recounted how Sinatra had addressed an autograph to him — the only autograph he possesses — as "the new blue eyes." "Except my eyes are green," Sting quipped.

The rocker prefaced the soulful title song from "The Last Ship" — his debut as a Broadway composer, which closed in January after a brief run — with the anecdote about the Queen Mother, who came to his hometown more than a half-century ago to christen a ship, and rode down his very own street "in a giant Rolls Royce" as he waved a Union Jack,



In this image released by Carnegie Hall, Sting performs at a gala benefit at Carnegie Hall in New York on Monday, Dec. 14, 2015, accompanied by the powerful Orchestra of St. Luke's, with many of his old classics arranged by conductor Rob Mathes, left.

(Chris Lee/Carnegie Hall via AP)

dressed in his Sunday best. "She caught my eye," he said, and kept looking. "I was infected with the idea that I didn't belong on that street, in that house," he said. "I wanted to be in that car ... I wanted to end up in Carnegie Hall. And here we are."

Sting dedicated "Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic" to his longtime, outgoing manager, Kathy Schenker, who was spending her last performance as his manager. He dedicated "Fields of Gold" to his wife, Trudie Styler, speaking of their country home in Eng-

land, where he said would hope to end his days under a copper beach tree. He made a brief reference to the gun control debate when he introduced "I Hung My Head," a song about an accidental shooting and its disastrous consequences. □

## Artist Josh Ritter stepping out of the confessional

DAVID BAUDER

AP Entertainment Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Personal lyrics are a staple for many singer-songwriters, who plumb the intimate details of their lives and spill them out onstage.

Josh Ritter avoided them until the 2013 album, "The Beast in Its Tracks," largely based on his experience bouncing back from a di-

voice. The gorgeous "Joy to You Baby," for example, nails that moment when bitterness lifts and you're able to legitimately wish an ex well.

Now that he's done it, the 39-year-old Brooklyn-based singer is closing the confessional.

"I believe it's something to be used sparingly, when you really can't avoid

it," said Ritter, father of a 3-year-old girl with his novelist partner Haley Tanner. "After a while, it's just boring. It's boring to look at yourself. Who wants to look at themselves in the mirror for very long, and who wants to listen to it?"

Music is entertainment, after all, and Ritter fears losing an audience with self-absorption.

"I dread being the last one to leave a party," he said. Ritter is touring this winter to support a new disc, "Sermon on the Rocks," which is filled with the literate wordplay that fans of the Moscow, Idaho, native (and published novelist) have become accustomed to. Several Biblical references in the lyrics make the disc's title inspiration obvious.

His focus is outward instead of inward. Words come in a torrent for the catchy "Getting Ready to Get Down," about a girl hustled off to a Bible college when it's clear she's having impure thoughts. He sings about a small-town murderer, a man intrigued by an old lover's return to town and the joy of living in the country. □

# The Affair,' 'Mad Men' and 'Frontline' Among Year's 10 Best

**'FRAZIER MOORE**  
AP Television Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Sure, 10 is an arbitrary number. If we were to add an 11th show, it might very well be HBO's sublimely shrewd comedy "Silicon Valley," or ABC's unbridled melodrama "Scandal," or Fox's noir thriller "Gotham." It

Perhaps the best but least-celebrated drama on the air, it marked a third season of crafty storytelling as it continued to explore the complex, death-defying lives of two Soviet KGB officers posing as an American married couple during the Cold War. The tangled storylines remained intriguing;

— " Fargo" (FX). A second season of doing the impossible — reimagining the 1996 film classic — this cycle has, if anything, improved on Season 1 with its completely new tale and slate of characters. Once again, it's a bizarre melange of heartland propriety, steely violence and

especially in plotting its farewell to glam gumshoe Kalinda (Archie Panjabi). But so far in Season 7, it's back in the swing. Adding Jeffrey Dean Morgan as its new investigator was a masterstroke. And the newly rejiggered storylines are as smart, snarled and zesty as ever. And funny!

— "Mad Men" (AMC). For anyone who was there, the '60s felt all-inclusive yet passed in a flash. Same for "Mad Men," whose saga began at the dawn of the '60s and closed out that decade when its final season aired last spring. Surprisingly, nearly everyone involved lived happily ever after, including the wily but often self-destructive ad man Don Draper (played by series star Jon Hamm). Most viewers were happy, too, with its slyly appropriate conclusion, but also sad to bid farewell to a TV masterpiece.

— "Narcos" (Netflix). This serialized, true-to-life thriller follows the exploits of Columbian drug kingpin Pablo Escobar and the Medellin Cartel, as well as the U.S. drug agents Escobar repeatedly outwits. Shot in Colombia and starring Brazilian actor Wagner Moura, it is a riveting portrait of evil, power and supreme craftiness. Happily for viewers, there's more evil to come from Escobar, with "Narcos" renewed for a second season. Until then, a warning: One taste of this first season could lead to a 10-episode binge.

— "Sense8" (Netflix). A fluid narrative takes viewers to eight cities where eight characters are somehow linked by an ability to share thoughts, feelings and visions they can't explain to themselves or anyone else. Viewers are invited to embark on this enchanting sci-fi thrill ride from the Wachowskis ("The Matrix"). Daryl Hannah and Naveen Andrews ("Lost") join a sprawling cast of mostly new faces in settings that range from Chicago to Seoul, from Mexico City to Mumbai. The visuals are dazzling, the soundtrack score is haunting, and the interlocking storylines may tax your understanding — that is, until you submit. After that, if you hear thunder on a bright, sunny day (as does one of the characters), no worries. Somewhere, it's storming and you might be there soon. □



This image released by AMC shows, from left, John Slattery as Roger Sterling, Jon Hamm as Don Draper, Vincent Kartheiser as Pete Campbell, Christina Hendricks as Joan Harris and Kevin Rahm as Ted Chaough, in a scene from the final season of "Mad Men." The show has been named one of the 10 Best TV shows by The Associated Press.

might even be "CBS This Morning," which continues to offer early risers a smart diet of news as opposed to the empty calories of its rivals on ABC and NBC. But 10 it is, so here, in alphabetical order, are this year's Big 10:

— "The Affair" (Showtime). A New York novelist has an affair and creates havoc for two families — his own and his lover's. The second season of this heated drama has been even better than the first, as the rewards of his infidelity disintegrate and the consequences mount. Meanwhile, quietly among its splendid cast, Maura Tierney as the wronged wife continues to prove herself as one of the finest actresses around. — "The Americans" (FX).

ing; with co-stars Keri Russell and Matthew Rhys so good in their multiple guises as undercover spies that they even escaped notice, yet again, from the Emmy and Golden Globes judges. For shame!

— "Better Call Saul" (AMC). The pain of losing "Breaking Bad" was salvaged for its fans by the return of Bob Odenkirk (who arrived at "BB" in its second season as welcome comic relief, then grew Saul into a full-fledged scene stealer) in this aptly quirky prequel. It was everything a "BB" devotee could have hoped for, and never less than true to the series that begat it, and yet, for anyone watching, was a constant surprise.

pitch-black humor. And once again, the cast (including Kirsten Dunst, Patrick Wilson, Jean Smart, Ted Danson and Jeffrey Donovan) is delicious.

— "Frontline" (PBS). Airing for more than 30 years, winner of more than two dozen Peabody Awards, it kept on keeping on this season with reports on the NRA, Vladimir Putin, torture by the CIA, Ebola, ISIS and the challenges faced by transgender youngsters. Somehow immune to the pressures and failings that compromise so much of TV public affairs, it continued its long reign enlightening the public.

— "The Good Wife" (CBS). This legal drama had a few false moments last spring,

Alan Cumming's fitful campaign strategist scores laughs in his every scene and, thanks to the fullness of all the characters, no one is immune from daffy moments. As it has been all along, "The Good Wife" remains a sophisticated drama full of human comedy.

— "Last Week Tonight with John Oliver" (HBO). Religion, chicken, net neutrality, voting rights for Guam, the injustice of bail — they're all the same to Oliver. In each weekly sermonette he sheds light on absurdities and scandals no one else is likely to be exposing, or, if they are, not with his thoroughness and/or wicked sense of humor. "Last Week," every week, is an indispensable half-hour.

(Justina Mintz/AMC via AP)